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S E R M O N S

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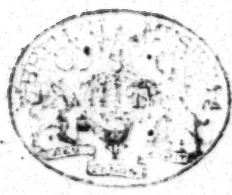
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S E R M O N I.

A C T S, X. 4.

Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

THE High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity dwelleth also with him that is of humble and contrite heart. In the midst of his glory, the Almighty is not inattentive to the meanest of his subjects. Neither obscurity of station, nor imperfection of knowledge, sinks those below his regard, who worship and obey him. Every prayer which they send up from their secret retirements, is listened to by him; and every work of charity which they perform, how unknown soever to the world, attracts his notice. The Text presents a single instance of this comfortable truth. In the city of Cæsarea, there dwelt a Roman centurion, a military Officer of inferior rank, a Gentile, neither by birth or religion entitled to the privileges of the Jewish nation. But he was a devout and a benevolent man; who, according to his measure of religious knowledge, studied to perform his duty, *prayed to God always, and gave much alms to the people.* Such a character passed not unobserved by God. So highly was it honoured, that to this good centurion an Angel was sent from heaven, in order to direct him to the means of full instruction in the truth. The Angel accosts him with this salutation, *Corneilius, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

It is to the conjunction of *prayers and alms*, that I purpose now to direct your thoughts, as describing the respectable and amiable character of a man, as forming the honour and the blessedness of a true Christian; piety joined with charity, faith with good works, devotion with morality. These are things which God hath connected, and which it is impious in man to separate. It is only when they remain united, that they can come up as a grateful *memorial before God*. I shall first endeavour to shew you, That alms without prayers, or prayers without alms, morality without devotion, or devotion without morality, are extremely defective; and then shall point out the happy effects of their mutual union.

LET us begin with considering the case of alms without prayers; that is of good works without piety or a proper sense of God and religion. Examples of this are not uncommon in the world. With many, Virtue is, or at least is pretended to be, a respectable and an honoured name, while Piety sounds meanly in their ears. They are men of the world, and they claim to be men of honour. They rest upon their humanity, their probity, and their truth. They arrogate to themselves all the manly and active virtues. But devout affections, and religious duties, they treat with contempt, as founded on shadowy speculations, and fit to employ the attention only of weak and superstitious minds. Now in opposition to such persons, I contend, That this neglect of piety argues depravity of heart; and that it infers an irregular discharge of the duties of morality.

FIRST, it argues internal depravity; for it discovers a cold and a hard heart. If there be any impression which man is formed by nature to receive, it is a sense of religion. As soon as his mind opens to observation and reflection, he discerns innumerable marks of his dependent state. He finds himself placed, by some superior power, in a vast world,
where

where the wisdom and goodness of the Creator are conspicuous on every side. The magnificence, the beauty and order of nature, excite him to admire and adore. When he looks up to that omnipotent hand which operates throughout the universe, he is impressed with reverence. When he receives blessings which he cannot avoid ascribing to divine goodness, he is prompted to gratitude. The expressions of those affections under the various forms of religious worship, are no other than native effusions of the human heart. Ignorance may mislead, and superstition may corrupt them; but their origin is derived from sentiments that are essential to man.

Cast your eyes over the whole earth. Explore the most remote quarters of the east or the west. You may discover tribes of men, without policy, or laws, or cities, or any of the arts of life: But no where will you find them without some form of religion. In every region you behold the prostrate worshipper, the temple, the altar, and the offering. Wherever men have existed, they have been sensible that some acknowledgement was due, on their part, to the Sovereign of the world. If in their rudest and most ignorant state, this obligation has been felt, what additional force must it acquire by the improvements of human knowledge, but especially by the great discoveries of the Christian revelation? Whatever, either from reverence or from gratitude, can excite men to the worship of God, is by this revelation placed in such a light, as one should think were sufficient to over-awe the most thoughtless, and to melt the most obdurate mind.

Canst thou, then, pretend to be a man of reason, nay, a man of virtue, and yet continue regardless of one of the first and chief dictates of human nature? Where is thy sensibility to what is right and fit, if that loud voice which calls all nations throughout the earth to religious homage, has never been heard by

thee? Or, if it has been heard, by what strange and false refinements hast thou stifled those natural sentiments which it tends to awaken? Calling thyself a son, a citizen, a friend; claiming to be faithful and affectionate in these relations; hast thou no sense of what thou owest to thy first Parent, thy highest Sovereign, thy greatest Benefactor? Can it be consistent with true virtue or honour, to value thyself upon thy regard to inferior obligations, and yet to violate that which is the most sacred and the most ancient of all? When simple instinct teaches the Tartar and the Indian, together with his alms and good works to join his prayers to that power whom he considers as the source of good, shall it be no reproach, in the most enlightened state of human nature, and under the purest dispensation of religion, to have extinguished the sense of gratitude to Heaven and to slight all acknowledgement of the great and the true God? What does such conduct imply, but either an entire want, or a wilful suppression, of some of the best and most generous affections belonging to human nature?—Surely there must be an essential defect in that heart which remains cold and insensible, where it ought to be affected most warmly. Surely, such a degree of depravity must be lodged there, as is sufficient to taint all the other springs of pretended virtue.

BUT besides this, I must contend, in the second place, That where religion is neglected, there can be no regular nor steady practice of the duties of morality. The character will be often inconsistent; and Virtue placed on a basis too narrow to support it, will be always loose and tottering. For such is the propensity of our nature to vice, so numerous are the temptations to a relaxed and immoral conduct, that stronger restraints than those of mere reason, are necessary to be imposed on man. The sense of right and wrong, the principle of honour, or the in-
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stinct of benevolence, are barriers too feeble to withstand the strength of passion. In the tranquil seasons of life, these natural principals may, perhaps, carry on the ordinary course of social duties with some regularity. But wait until some trying emergence come. Let the conflict of passions arise. Let the heart be either wounded by sore distress, or agitated by violent emotions; and you shall presently see, that virtue without religion is inadequate to the government of life. It is destitute of its proper guard, of its firmest support, of its chief encouragement. It will sink under the weight of misfortune; or will yield to the solicitation of guilt.

The great motives that produce constancy and firmness of action, must be of a palpable and striking kind. A divine Legillator, uttering his voice from heaven; an omniscient Witness, beholding us in all in our retreats; an almighty Governour, stretching forth his arm to punish or reward, disclosing the secrets of the invincible world, informing us of perpetual rest prepared hereafter for the righteous, and of *indignation and wrath* awaiting the wicked: These are the considerations which over-awe the world, which support integrity, and check guilt. They add to virtue that solemnity which should ever characterize it. To the admonitions of conscience they give the authority of a law. Co-operating with all the good dispositions of a pious man, they strengthen and insure their influence. On his alms you can have no certain dependance, who thinks not of God, nor has joined prayer to his charitable deeds. But when humanity is seconded by piety, the spring from which it flows is rendered of course, more regular and constant.—In short, withdraw religion, and you shake all the pillars of morality. In every heart you waken the influence of virtue: And among the multitude, the bulk of mankind, you overthrow its power.

HAVING thus shewn that morality without devo-

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HAVING thus shewn that morality without devo-

tion is both defective and unstable, I proceed to consider the other extreme, of prayers without alms, devotion without morality.

In every age the practice has prevailed, of substituting certain appearances of piety in the place of the great duties of humanity and mercy. Too many there have always been, who flatter themselves with the hope of obtaining the friendship of their Creator, though they neglect to do justice to their fellow-creatures. But such persons may be assured, that their supposed piety is altogether of a spurious kind. It is an invention of their own, unknown to reason, unknown in the word of God. In scripture we are ever directed to try our faith by our works, our love of God by our love of men. We are directed to consider piety as a principle which regenerates the heart, and forms it to goodness. We are taught that in vain we address any acts of homage to Christ, unless we *do the things which he saith*; and that *love, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness and temperance* are not only the injunctions of his law, but the native *fruits of his spirit*. If, therefore, while piety seems ardent, morality shall decline, you have full reason to believe that into that piety some corrupting ingredients have entered. And if ever your regard to morality shall totally fail; if, while you make many prayers, you give no alms; if, while you appear to be zealous for God, you are false or unjust to men; if you are hard or contracted in heart, severe in your censures, and oppressive in your conduct; then, conclude with certainty, that what you had termed piety was no more than an empty name. For as soon, according to the scripture similitude, will *bitter waters flow from a sweet fountain*, as such effects be produced by genuine piety.

What you have called by that name, resolves itself into one or other of three things. Either it is an hypocritical form of godliness, assumed in order to impose on the world; or which is the most favourable

able supposition, it is a transient impression of seriousness, an accidental melting of the heart, which *passes away like the morning cloud and the early dew*; or, which I am afraid is too often the case, it is the deliberate refuge of a deluded and superstitious, but at the same time a corrupted mind. For all men, even the most depraved, are subject more or less, to compunctions of conscience. It has never been in their power to withdraw totally beyond the reach of that warning voice, which tells them that something is necessary to be done, in order to make their peace with the Ruler of the world. But, backward at the same time to resign the gains of dishonesty, or the pleasures of vice; averse from submission to that sacred law which enjoins righteousness in its whole extent, they have often attempted to make a sort of composition with Heaven; a composition, which, though they dare not avow it in words, lurks in secret at the bottom of many a heart. If God will only dispense with some articles of obedience, they will repay him with abundant homage. If they fail in good practice, they will study to be sound in belief; and by the number of their prayers, will atone, in some measure, for their deficiency in charitable deeds.

But the attempt is as vain, as it is impious. From the simplest and plainest principals of reason it must appear, that religious worship, disjoined from justice and virtue, can upon no account whatever find acceptance with the Supreme Being. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity even the solemn meetings.*—Cease, foolish and impious man! Cease to consider the Almighty as a weak or vain-glorious being, who is to be appeased by thy devout prostrations, and thy humble words; or to be gratified by the parade and ostentation of external

worship. What is all thy worship to him? *Will he eat the flesh of thy sacrifices, or drink the blood of offered goats?* Was worship required of thee, dost thou think, upon his account, that thou mightest bring any increase to his glory and felicity by thy weak and insignificant praises? Sooner mightest thou increase the splendour of the sun by a lighted taper, or add to the thunder by thy voice. No: It is for the sake of man, not of God, that worship and prayers are required; not that God may be rendered more glorious, but that man may be made better; that he may be confirmed in a proper sense of his dependant state, and acquire those pious and virtuous dispositions in which his highest improvement consists.

Of all the principles in religion, one should take this to be the most evident; and yet frequent admonitions are needed, to renew the impression of it upon mankind. For what purpose did thy Creator place thee in this world, in the midst of human society, but that as a man among men thou mightest cultivate humanity, that each in his place might contribute to the general welfare; that as a spouse, a brother, a son, or a friend, thou mightest act thy part with an upright and a tender heart; and thus aspire to resemble Him who ever consults the good of his creatures, and whose *tender mercies are over all his works*? And darest thou, who has been sacrificing unsuspecting innocence to thy loose pleasures; thou, who hast been disturbing the repose of society by thine ambition or craft; thou, who, to increase thy treasures, hast been making the widow and the orphan weep; darest thou approach God with thy worship and thy prayers, and entertain the hope that he will look down upon thee in peace? Will the God of order and justice accept such poor compensation for his violated laws? Will the God of love regard the services of one who is an enemy to his creatures? Shall a corrupter of the society of men aspire to the habitations

habitations of pure and blessed spirits?—Believe it, *He that saith he loveth God, must love his brother also. Cease to do evil; learn to do well. Seek judgment relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow:* And then, *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to thee; call upon him in the day of trouble, and he will answer thee.* Thy prayers and thine alms, shall then ascend, in joint memorial, before the Most High.

I HAVE now shewn the evil of maiming and splitting religion; of dividing asunder two things, which though in theory they may be separated, yet in practice must always co-exist if either of them be real, Devotion to God and Charity to Men. Let us consider next the happy effects of their union.

Their union forms the consistent, the graceful, the respectable character of the real Christian, the man of true worth. If you leave either of them out of your system, even though you excel in the other, you can stand but only in one point of view. It is only on one side your character is fair; on the other, it will always be open to much reproach. And as you dishonour yourselves, so you do great injustice to religion. For, by dividing its parts from one another, you never fail to expose it to the censure of the world: And perhaps, by this sort of partial and divided goodness, religion has suffered more in the esteem of mankind, than by open profligacy. The unbeliever will scoff at your piety, when he sees you negligent of moral duties. The bigot will decry all morality, when he sees you pretending to be a follower of virtue, though you be a despiser of God. Whereas he who fears God, and is at the same time just and beneficent to men, exhibits religion to the world with full propriety. It shines in his conduct with its native splendour; and its rays throw a glory round him. His character is above reproach. It is at once amiable and venerable. Malice itself is afraid to attack him;

him ; and even the worst men respect and honour him in their hearts.

This too is the man whose life will be most peaceful and happy. He who fails materially either in piety or in virtue, is always obnoxious to the anguish of remorse. His partial goodness may flatter him in the day of superficial observation ; but when solitude or distress awakens the powers of reflection, he shall be made to feel, that one part of duty performed, atones not for another which is neglected. In the midst of his prayers, the remembrance of injustice will upbraid him with hypocrisy ; and in the distribution of his alms, the prayers which the poor put up for him, will make him blush for his neglect of God. Conscience will supply the place of the hand coming forth to write over against him on the wall, *Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.* Whereas he who holds both faith and a good conscience, who attends equally to the discharge of his duty towards God and towards Man, enjoys, as far as human imperfection allows, the sense of fairness and consistency in conduct, of integrity and soundness of heart.

The man of mere morality, is a stranger to all the delicate and refined pleasures of devotion. In works of beneficence and mercy, he may enjoy satisfaction. But his satisfaction is destitute of that glow of affection, which enlivens the feelings of one who lifts his heart at the same time to the Father of the universe, and considers himself as imitating God. The man again who rests solely on devotion, if that devotion open not his heart to humanity, not only remains a stranger to the pleasures of beneficence, but must often undergo the pain arising from bad passions. But when beneficence and devotion are united, they pour upon the man in whom they meet, the full pleasures of a good and a pure heart. His alms connected him with men ; his prayers with God. He
looks

looks without dismay on both worlds. All nature has to him a benign aspect. If engaged in active life, he is the friend of men; and he is happy in the exertions of that friendship. If left in retirement, he walks among the works of nature, as with God. Every object is enlivened to him by the sense of the Divine presence. Every where he traces the beneficent hand of the Author of nature; and every where, with glowing heart, he hears and answers his secret voice. When he looks up to heaven, he rejoices in the thought that there dwells that God whom he serves and honours; that Saviour in whom he trusts; that Spirit of grace from whose inspiration his piety and his charity flow. When he looks around him on the world, he is soothed with the pleasing remembrance of good offices which he has done or at least has studied to do, to many who dwell there.—How comfortable the reflection, that him no poor man can upbraid for having withheld his due; him no unfortunate man can reproach for having seen and despised his sorrows; but that on his head are descending the prayers of the needy and the aged; and that the hands of those whom his protection has supported, or his bounty has fed, are lifted up in secret to bless him!

Life passed under the influence of such dispositions, naturally leads to a happy end. It is not enough to say, that faith and piety, joined with active virtue, constitute the requisite preparation for heaven. They in truth begin the enjoyment of heaven. In every state of our existence, they form the chief ingredients of felicity. Hence they are the great marks of Christian regeneration. They are the signature of that Holy Spirit, by which good men are said to be *sealed unto the day of redemption*.—The text affords a striking proof of the estimation in which they are held by God. Amidst that infinite variety of human events which pass under his eye, the prayers and the
alm

alms of CORNELIUS attracted his particular notice. He remarked the amiable dispositions which rose in the heart of this good man. But he saw that they were yet imperfect, while he remained unenlightened by the principles of the Christian religion. In order to remove this obstruction to his rising graces, and to bring him to the full knowledge of that God whom he sought to honour, he was favoured with a supernatural message from heaven. While the princes of the earth were left to act by the counsels of their own wisdom; while, without interposition from above, Generals conquered or fell, according to the vicissitude of human things: to this good centurion an Angel was commissioned from the throne of God.

What can I say more or higher in praise of this blessed character, than that it is what God delights to honour? Men single out as the objects of distinction, the great, the brave, or the renowned. But he *who seeth not as man seeth*, passing by those qualities which often shine with false splendour to human observation, looks to the inward principles of action; to those principles which form the essence of a worthy character; and which, if called forth, would give birth to whatever is laudable or excellent in conduct.—Is there one, though in humble station or obscure life, who *feareth God and worketh righteousness*; whose prayers and alms, proceeding in regular unaffected tenour, bespeak the upright, the tender, the devout heart?—Those alms and prayers come up in memorial before that God who is *no respecter of persons*. The Almighty beholds him from his throne with complacency. Divine illumination is ready to instruct him. Angels minister to him. They now mark him out on earth as their future associate; and for him they make ready in paradise, the *white robes*, the *palms*, and the *sceptres* of the just.

To this honour, to this blessedness, let our hearts continually aspire; and throughout the whole of life,

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let those solemn and sacred words, with which I conclude, sound in our ears, and be the great directory of our conduct: *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but—to do justly, and love mercy—and to walk humbly with thy God?*

S E R M O N II.

PSALM xxvii. 5.

*In the time of trouble, he shall hide me in his pavilion;
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he
shall set me up upon a rock.*

THE life of man has always been a very mixed state, full of uncertainty and vicissitude, of anxieties and fears. In every religious audience; there are many who fall under the denomination of the unfortunate; and the rest are ignorant how soon they may be called to join them. For the prosperity of no man on earth is stable and assured. Dark clouds may soon gather over the heads of those whose sky is now most bright. In the midst of the deceitful calm which they enjoy, the storm that is to overwhelm them has perhaps already begun to ferment. *If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.*

Hence, to a thoughtful mind, no study can appear more important, than how to be suitably prepared for the misfortunes of life; so as to contemplate them in prospect without dismay, and, if they must befall, to bear them without dejection. Throughout every age, the wisdom of the wise, the treasures of the rich,

rich, and the power of the mighty, have been employed, either in guarding their state against the approach of distress, or in rendering themselves less vulnerable by its attacks. Power has endeavoured to remove adversity to a distance. Philosophy has studied, when it drew nigh, to conquer it by patience; and Wealth has sought out every pleasure that can compensate or alleviate pain.

While the wisdom of the world is thus occupied, religion has been no less attentive to the same important object. It informs us in the Text, of a *pavilion* which God erects to shelter his servants *in time of trouble* of a *secret place in his tabernacle* into which he brings them, of a *rock on which he sets them up*? and elsewhere he tells us, of a *shield and a buckler* which he spreads before them, to *cover them from the terror by night, and the arrow that flieth by day*. Now of what nature are those instruments of defence, which God is represented as providing with such solicitous care to those who fear him? Has he reared up any bulwarks, impregnable by misfortune, in order to separate the pious and virtuous from the rest of mankind, and to screen them from the common disasters of life? No: To those disasters we behold them liable no less than others. The defence, which religion provides, is altogether of an internal kind. It is the heart, not the outward state, which it professes to guard. When the *time of trouble* comes, as come it must to all; it places good men under the *pavilion* of the Almighty, by affording them that security and peace which arise from the belief of divine protection. It brings them into the *secret of his tabernacle*, by opening to them sources of consolation which are hidden from others. By that strength of mind with which it endows them, *it sets them up upon a rock*, against which the tempest may violently beat, but which it cannot shake.

How

How far the comforts proceeding from religion merit those high titles under which they are here figuratively described, I shall in this discourse endeavour to show. I shall for this end compare together the situation of bad men and that of the good, when both are suffering the misfortunes of life; and then make such improvement as the subject will naturally suggest.

I. RELIGION prepares the mind for encountering, with fortitude, the most severe shocks of adversity; whereas vice, by its natural influence on the temper, tends to produce dejections under the slightest trials. While worldly men enlarge their possessions, and extend their connections, they imagine they are strengthening themselves against all the possible vicissitudes of life. They say in their hearts, *My mountain stands strong, and I shall never be moved.* But so fatal is their delusion, that instead of strengthening, they are wakening that which only can support them; when those vicissitudes come. It is their mind, which must then support them; and their mind, by their sensual attachments is corrupted and enfeebled. Addicted with intemperate fondness to the pleasures of the world, they incur two great and certain evils; they both exclude themselves from every resource except the world, and they increase their sensibility to every blow which comes upon them from that quarter.

They have neither principles nor temper which can stand the assault of trouble. They have no principles which lead them to look beyond the ordinary rotation of events; and therefore, when misfortunes involve them, the prospect must be comfortless on every side. Their crimes have disqualified them for looking up to the assistance of any higher power than their own ability, or for relying on any better guide than their own wisdom. And as from principle they can derive no support, so in a temper corrupted by prosperity they find no relief. They have lost that moderation

moderation of mind which enables a wise man to accommodate himself to his situation. Long fed with false hopes, they are exasperated and stung by every disappointment. Luxurious and effeminate, they can bear no uneasiness. Proud and presumptuous, they can brook no opposition. By nourishing dispositions which so little suit this uncertain state, they have infused a double portion of bitterness into the cup of woe; they have sharpened the edge of that sword which is lifted up to smite them. Strangers to all the temperate satisfactions of a good and a pure mind; strangers to every pleasure except what was seasoned by vice or vanity, their adversity is to the last degree disconsolate. Health and opulence were the two pillars on which they rested. Shake either of them; and their whole edifice of hope and comfort falls. Prostrate and forlorn, they are left on the ground; obliged to join with the man of Ephraim in his abject lamentation, *The have taken away my gods, which I have made, and what have I more?*—Such are the causes to to which we must ascribe the broken spirits, the peevish temper, and impatient passions, that so often attend the declining age, or falling fortunes of vicious men.

But how different is the condition of a truly good man in those trying situations of life! Religion had gradually prepared his mind for all the events of this inconstant state. It had instructed him in the nature of true happiness. It had early weaned him from the undue love of the world, by discovering to him its vanity, and by setting higher prospects in his view. Afflictions do not attack him by surprise, and therefore do not overwhelm him. He was equipped for the storm, as well as the calm, in this dubious navigation of life. Under those conditions he knew himself to be brought thither, that he was not to retain always the enjoyment of what he loved: And therefore he is not overcome by disappointment, when
that

that which is mortal, dies; when that which is mutable, begins to change; and when that which he knew to be transient, passes away.

All the principles which religion teaches, and all the habits which it forms, are favourable to strength of mind. It will be found, that whatever purifies, fortifies also the heart. In the course of living *righteously, soberly, and godly*, a good man acquires a steady and well-governed spirit. Trained by Divine grace, to enjoy with moderation the advantages of the world, neither lifted up by success, nor enervated with sensuality, he meets the changes in his lot without unmanly dejection. He is inured to temperance and restraint. He has learned firmness and self-command. He is accustomed to look up to that Supreme Providence, which disposes of human affairs, not with reverence only, but with trust and hope.

The time of prosperity was to him not merely a season of barren joy, but productive of much useful improvement. He had cultivated his mind. He had stored it with useful knowledge, with good principles, and virtuous dispositions. These resources remain entire when the days of trouble come. They remain with him in sickness, as in health; in poverty, as in the midst of riches; in his dark and solitary hours, no less than when surrounded with friends and gay society. From the glare of prosperity, he can, without dejection withdraw into the shade. Excluded from several advantages of the world, he may be obliged to retreat into a narrower circle; but within that circle he will find many comforts left. His chief pleasures were always of the calm, innocent, and temperate kind; and over these, the changes of the world have the least power. His mind is a kingdom to him; and he can still enjoy it. The world did not bestow upon him all his enjoyments; and therefore it is not in the power of the world, by its most cruel attacks, to carry them all away.

II. THE distresses of life are alleviated to good men, by reflections on their past conduct; while, by such reflections, they are highly aggravated to the bad. During the gay and active periods of life, sinners elude, in some measure, the force of conscience. Carried round in the whirl of affairs and pleasures; intent on contrivance, or eager in pursuit; amused by hope, or elated by enjoyment; they are sheltered by that croud of trifles which surrounds them, from serious thought. But conscience is too great a power to remain always suppressed. There is in every man's life, a period when he shall be made to stand forth as a real object to his own view: And when that period comes, Wo to him who is galled by the sight! In the dark and solitary hour of distress, with a mind hurt and sore from some recent wound of fortune, how shall he bear to have his character for the first time disclosed to him, in that humiliating light under which guilt will necessarily present it? Then the recollection of the past becomes dreadful. It exhibits to him a life thrown away on vanities and follies, or consumed in flagitiousness and sin; no station properly supported; no material duties fulfilled. Crimes which once had been easily palliated, rise before him in their native deformity. The sense of guilt mixes itself with all that has befallen him. He beholds, or thinks that he beholds, the hand of the God whom he hath offended, openly stretched out against him.—At a season when a man stands most in need of support, how intolerable is the weight of this additional load aggravating the depression of disease, disappointment, or old age! How miserable his state, who is condemned to endure at once the pangs of guilt, and the vexations of calamity! *The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit, who can bear?*

Whereas, he who is blessed with a clear conscience, enjoys, in the worst conjunctures of human life, a peace,

peace, a dignity, an elevation of mind, peculiar to virtue. The testimony of a good conscience is indeed to be always distinguished from that presumptuous boast of innocence, which every good Christian totally disclaims. The better he is, he will be the more humble, and sensible of his failings. But though he acknowledge that he can claim nothing from God upon the footing of desert, yet he can trust in his merciful acceptance through Jesus Christ, according to the terms of the gospel. He can hope, that his *prayers and his alms have come up in memorial before God.* The piety and virtue of his former life were as seeds sown in his prosperous state, of which he reaps the fruit in the season of adversity. The riches, the pleasures, and the friends of the world, may have made *wings to themselves, and flown away.* But the improvement which he made of those advantages while they lasted, the temperate spirit with which he enjoyed them, the beneficent actions which he performed, and the good example which he set to others, remain behind. By the memory of these, he enjoys his prosperity a second time in reflection; and perhaps this second and reflected enjoyment is not inferior to the first. It arrives at a more critical and needful time. It affords him the high satisfaction of having extracted lasting pleasure from that which is short; and of having fixed that which by its nature was changing.—“If my race be now about to end,
 “I have this comfort that it has not been run in vain.
 “*I have fought the good fight; I have kept the faith.*
 “My mind has no load. Futurity has no terrors.
 “I have endeavoured to do my duty, and to make
 “my peace with God. I leave the rest to Heaven,”
 These are the reflections which *to the upright make light arise in darkness*; reflections which cheer the lonely house of virtuous poverty, and attend the conscientious sufferer into prison or exile; which sooth the complaints of grief, lighten the pressure of old age,

age, and furnish to the bed of sickness, a cordial of more grateful relish, and more sovereign virtue, than any which the world can afford.

Look abroad into life, and you will find the general sense of mankind bearing witness to this important truth, that mind is superiour to fortune; that what one feels within, is of much greater importance than all that befalls him without. Let a man be brought into some such severe and trying situation, as fixes the attention of the publick on his behaviour. The first question which we put concerning him, is not, What does he suffer? but, How does he bear it? Has he a quiet mind? or, Does he appear to be unhappy within? If we judge him to be composed and firm, resigned to Providence, and supported by conscious integrity, his character rises, and his misery lessens in our view. We esteem and admire, rather than pity him. Recollect what only man have endured for the sake of conscience, and with what cheerfulness they have suffered. On the other hand, when conscience has concurred with outward misfortunes in distressing the guilty, think of the dreadful consequences which have ensued. How often upon a reverse of fortune, after abused prosperity, have they madly hurried themselves over that precipice from which there is no return; and, in what nature most abhors the voluntary extinction of life, have sought relief from that torment of reflection, which was become too great for them to bear?

Never then allow yourselves to imagine, that misfortunes alone form the chief misery of man. None but the guilty are completely miserable. The misgiving and distrust, the accusations and reproaches of their minds, the sense of having drawn down upon their heads the evils which they suffer, and the terrifying expectation of more and worse evils to come; these are the essential ingredients of human misery. They not only whet the edge, but they envenom the darts

darts of affliction, and add poison to the wound. Whereas, when misfortunes assail a good man, they carry on such fatal auxiliaries in their train. They may ruffle the surface of his soul; but there is a strength within, which resists their farther impression. The constitution of his mind is sound. The world can inflict upon it no wounds, but what admit of cure.

III. ALL men in the time of trouble, can look up to no protector; while good men commit themselves, with trust and hope, to the care of Heaven. The human mind, naturally feeble, is made to feel all its weakness by the pressure of adversity. Dejected with evils which overpower its strength, it relies no longer on itself. It casts every where around, a wishing, exploring eye, for some shelter to screen, some power to uphold it; and if, when abandoned by the world, it can find nothing to which it may fly in the room of the world, its state is truly forlorn. Now, whither should the ungodly, in this situation, turn for aid? After having contended with the storms of adverse fortune till their spirits are exhausted, gladly would they retreat at last to the sanctuary of religion. But that sanctuary is shut against them; nay, it is environed with terrors. They behold there, not a Protector to whom they can fly, but a Judge whom they dread; and in those moments when they need his friendship the most, they are reduced to deprecate his wrath. If he once *called when they refused, and stretched out his hands when they would not regard*, who much reason have they to fear that he will leave them now *to eat the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices*; that he *will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh*?

But of all the thoughts which can enter into the mind, in the season of distress, the belief of an interest in his favour who rules the world is the most soothing.

soothing. Every form of religion has afforded to virtuous men some degree of this consolation. But it was reserved for the Christian revelation, to carry it to its highest point. For it is the direct scope of that revelation, to accommodate itself to the circumstances of man, under two main views; as guilty in the sight of God, and as struggling with the evils of the world. Under the former, it discovers to him a Mediator and an atonement; under the latter, it promises him the Spirit of grace and consolation. It is a system of complete relief, extending from our spiritual to our temporal distresses. The same hand which holds out forgiveness to the penitent, and assistance to the frail, dispenses comfort and hope to the afflicted.

It deserves your particular notice, in this view, that there is no character which God more frequently assumes to himself in the sacred writings, than that of the Patron of the distressed. Compassion is the attribute of his nature which he has chosen to place in the greatest variety of lights, on purpose that he might accommodate his majesty to our weakness, and provide a cordial for human griefs. He is the hearer of all prayers; but with particular attention he is represented as listening to the *cry of the poor*, and *regarding the prayer of the destitute*. All his creatures he governs with justice and wisdom; but he takes to himself, in a special manner, the charge of *executing judgment for the oppressed*, of *protecting the stranger*; of *delivering him who hath no helper from the hand of the spoiler*. For the oppression of the poor, and for the sighing of the needy, will I arise, saith the Lord, to set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. He is the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widow, in his holy habitation. He raised up them that are bowed down. He dwelleth with the contrite. He healeth the broken in heart. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.— If the wisdom of his providence saw it necessary to place

place so many of his creatures in an afflicted state, that state, however, he commiserates. He disdains not to point out himself as the refuge of the virtuous and pious; and to invite them, amidst all their troubles, to pour out their hearts before him. Those circumstances which estrange others from them, interest him the more in their situation. The neglect or scorn of the world exposes them not to any contempt in his sight. No obscurity conceals them from his notice; and though they should be forgotten by every friend on earth, they are remembered by the God of heaven. That sigh, heaved from the afflicted bosom, which is heard by no human ear, is listened to by him; and that tear is remarked, which falls unnoticed or despised by the world.

Such views of the Supreme Being, impart the most sensible consolation to every pious heart. They present his administration under an aspect so mild and benign, as in a great measure to disperse the gloom which hangs over human life. A good man acts with a vigour, and suffers with a patience more than human, when he believes himself countenanced by the Almighty. Injured or oppressed by the world, he looks up to a Judge who will vindicate his cause; he appeals to a witness who knows his integrity; he commits himself to a Friend who will never forsake him. When tired with the vexations of life, devotion opens to him its quiet retreat, where the tumults of the world are hushed, and its cares are lost in happy oblivion; where *the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest*. There his mind regains its serenity; the agitation of passion is calmed; and a softening balm is infused into the wounds of the spirit. Disclosing to an invisible Friend those secret griefs which he has no encouragement to make known to the world, his heart is lightened. He does not feel himself solitary or forsaken. He believes God to be present with him, and the Holy Ghost to be

be the inspirer of his consolations. From that *secret place of the divine tabernacle*, into which the Text represents him as admitted, he hears this voice issue, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee. Fear not; for I am with thee. Be not dismayed; for I am thy God.' And as he hears a voice which speaks to none but the pure in heart, so he beholds a hand which sinners cannot see. He beholds the hand of Providence conducting all the hidden springs and movements of the universe; and with a secret, but unerring operation, directing every event towards the happiness of the righteous. Those afflictions which appear to others the messengers of the wrath of Heaven, appear to him the ministers of sanctification and wisdom. Where they discern nothing but the horrors of the tempest which surrounds them, his more enlightened eye beholds the Angel who rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm. Hence a *peace keeping the mind and heart*, which is no where to be found but under the *pavilion of the Almighty*.

IV. GOOD men are comforted under their troubles by the hope of Heaven; while bad men are not only deprived of this hope, but distressed with fears arising from a future state. The soul of man can never divest itself wholly of anxiety about its fate hereafter. There are hours when even to the prosperous, in the midst of their pleasures, eternity is an awful thought. But much more when those pleasures, one after another, begin to withdraw; when life alters its form, and becomes dark and cheerless; when its changes warm the most inconsiderate, that what is so mutable will soon pass entirely away; then with pungent earnestness comes home that question to the heart. Into what world are we next to go?—How miserable the man, who, under the distractions of calamity, hangs doubtful about an event which so nearly concerns him: who, in the midst of doubts and

and anxieties, approaching to that awful boundry, which seperates this world from the next; shudders at the dark prospect before him; wishing to exist after death, and yet afraid of that existance; catching at every feeble hope which superstition can afford him, and trembling in the same moment, from reflection upon his crimes!

But blessed be God who hath *brought life and immortality to light*; who hath not only brought them to light, but secured them to good men; and by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, hath *begotten them unto the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*. Justly is this hope styled in scripture, the *anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast*. For what an anchor is to a ship in a dark night, on an unknown coast, and amidst a boisterous ocean, that is this hope to the soul when distracted by the confusions of the world. In danger, it gives security; amidst general fluctuation, it affords one fixed point of rest. It is indeed the most eminent of all the advantages which religion now confers. For, consider the mighty power of hope over the human mind. It is the universal comforter. It is the spring of all human activity. Upon futurity, men are constantly suspended. Animated by the prospect of some distant good, they toil and suffer through the whole course of life; and it is not so much what they are at present, as what they hope to be in some after time, that enlivens their motions; fixes attention, and stimulates industry. Now, if in the common affairs of life such is the energy of hope, even when its object is neither very considerable, nor very certain; what effects may it not be expected to produce, when it rests upon an object so splendid as a life of immortal felicity? were this hope entertained with that full persuasion which Christian faith demands, it would, in truth, not merely alleviate, but totally annihilate, all human miseries,

miseries. It would banish discontent, extinguish grief, and suspend the very feeling of pain.

But allowing for the mixture of human frailty; admitting those abatements which our imperfection makes upon the effect of every religious principle, still, you will find, that in proportion to the decree in which the hope of heaven operates upon good men they will be tranquil under sufferings; nay, they will be happy, in comparison of those who enjoy no such relief. What indeed, in the course of human affairs, is sufficient to distress, far less to overwhelm, the mind of that man who can look down on all human things from an elevation so much above them? He is only a passenger through this world. He is travelling to a happier country. How disagreeable soever the occurrences of his journey may be, yet, at every stage of that journey, he receives the assurance that he is drawing nearer and nearer to the period of rest and felicity—Endure and thou shalt overcome. Persevere, and thou shalt be successful. The time of trial hastens to a close. Thy mansion is prepared above; thy rest remaineth among the people of God. The disorders which vice has introduced into the works of God, are about to terminate, and all tears are soon to be wiped away from the eyes of the just.—The firm assurance of this happy conclusion to the vexations and the vanities of life, works a greater effect on the sincere illiterate Christian, than all the refinements of philosophy can work on the most learned infidel. These may gratify the mind that is at ease; may sooth the heart when slightly discomposed; but but when it is sore and deeply torn, when bereaved of its best and most beloved comforts, the only consolations that can find access, arise from the hope of another world; where those comforts shall be again restored; and all the virtuous shall be assembled in the presence of him who made them. Such hopes banish that despair which overwhelms, and leave only

only that tender melancholy which softens the heart, and often renders the whole character more gentle and amiable.

Of this nature are the resources which religion provides for good men. By its previous discipline, it trains them to fortitude; by the reflections of a good conscience it soothes, by the sense of Divine favour it supports them; and when every comfort fails them on earth, it cheers them with the hope of Heaven. Distinguishing his servants with such advantages, God is justly said to erect *his pavilion* over them in the evil time. He not only *spreadeth a tent for them in the wilderness*, but he transforms in some measure the state of nature around them. To use the beautiful language of ancient prophecy; *In the desert, the thirsty land, where no water is, he openeth springs: Instead of the thorn, he maketh the fir-tree to come up; instead of the briar, the myrtle to spring. In midst of the habitation of dragons, he maketh green pastures to rise, and still waters flow around his people.*

THE improvement to be made of these truths, is as obvious, as it is important. Let us study so to conduct our lives, that we may be qualified for deriving such consolations from religion. To their reality, and their importance, all mankind bear witness. For no sooner are they overtaken by distress, than to religion they fly. This, throughout every age, has been the universal shelter which the young and the old, the high and the low, the giddy and the serious, have sought to gain, as soon as they found that rest could be no where else procured for the weary head, or the aching heart. But amidst those multitudes that crowd to religion for relief, how few are entitled to approach that sacred source of comfort? On what feeble props do their hopes and pretensions rest. How much superstition mingles with that religion to which men are driven by distress and fear?—You must first apply to it as the guide of life, before you can have

recourse to it as the refuge of sorrow. You must submit in its legislative authority, and experience its renewing influence, before you can look for its consolatory effect. You must secure the testimony of a good conscience, and peace with God through Jesus Christ? otherwise *when the floods shall come, and the rains descend, and the winds blow*, the house which you had proposed for your retreat, shall prove *the house founded on the sand, not on the rock.*

There are two plans, and there are but two, on which any man can propose to conduct himself through the dangers and distresses of human life. The one is the plan of worldly wisdom; the other, that of determined adherence to conscience. He who acts upon the former, lays principle aside, and thrusts his defence to his art and ability. He avails himself of every advantage which his knowledge of the world suggests. He attends to nothing but what he considers as his interest; and unconfined by conscience, pursues it by every course which promises him success. This plan, though too often adopted, will be found on trial, ineffectual and deceitful, for human ability is an unequal match for the violent and unforeseen vicissitudes of the world. When these torrents rise in their might, they sweep away in a moment the banks which worldly wisdom had reared for defence, and overwhelm alike the crafty and the artless. In the mean time, persons of this character condemn themselves to live a most unquiet life. They pass their days in perpetual anxiety, listening to every motion; startled by every alarm; changing their measures on every new occurrence; and when distress breaks in over all their defences, they are left under it, helpless and disconsolate.

The plan which, in opposition to this, religion recommends, as both more honourable in itself, and more effectual for security, is, at all hazards, to do your duty, and to leave the consequences to God.

Let

Let him who would act upon this plan, adopt for for the rule of his conduct that maxim of the Psalmist's. *Trust in the Lord, and do good.* To firm integrity, let him join an humble reliance on God. Let his adherence to duty, encourage his religious trust. Let his religious trust, inspire him with fortitude in the performance of his duty. Let him know no path but the straight and direct one. In the most critical moments of action, let him ask no further questions, than, What is the right, the fit, the worthy part? How as a man, and as a christian, it becomes him to act? Having received the discision of conscience, let him *commit his way to the Lord.* Let him without trepidation or wavering, proceed in discharging his duty; resolved, that though the world may make him unfortunate, it shall never make him base; and considering, that in what God and his conscience require him to act or suffer, God and a good conscience will support him—Such principals as these, are the best preparation for the vicissitudes of the human lot. They are the shield of inward peace. He who thinks and acts thus, shall be exposed to no wounds but what religion can cure. He may feel the blows of adversity: but he shall not know the wounds of the heart.

S E R M O N III.

PSALM i. 3.

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

THE happy influence of religion upon human life, in the time of adversity, has been considered

sidered in the preceeding discourse. Concerning this the sentiments of men are more generally agreed, that with respect to some other prerogatives which religion claims. They very readily assign to it the office of a Comforter. But as long as their state is prosperous, they are apt to account it an unnecessary guest, perhaps an unwelcome intruder. Let us not be thus unjust to religion, nor confine its importance to one period only in the life of man. It was never intended to be merely the nurse of sickness, and the staff of old age. I purpose now to show you, That it is no less essential to the enjoyment of prosperity, than to the comfort of adversity: That prosperity is prosperous, if we may be allowed the expression, to a good man only: and that to every other person, it would prove, notwithstanding its fair appearance, a barren and joyless state.

The Psalmist, in the Text, by an image taken from one of the most beautiful objects in nature, describes a man who flourishes in full prosperity. But to whom is the description limited? To him as the preceding verses inform us, *that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but hath his delight in the law of God.* He only is like the tree planted by the rivers of waters; whilst the ungodly, as he adds, *are not so;* but, how prosperous soever they may appear to the world, are in truth but like the chaff which the wind driesth away. In confirmation of this doctrine, I shall lay before you some of those circumstances which distinguish the prosperity of the good man beyond that of the sinner; and shall conclude, with pointing out the dangers and miseries, into which the latter is apt to be betrayed, by his favourable situation in the world.

I. PIETY, and gratitude to God, contribute in a high degree to enliven prosperity. Gratitude is a pleasing emotion. The sense of being distinguished by the

the kindness of another, gladdens the heart, warms it with reciprocal affection, and gives to any possession which is agreeable in itself, a double relish, from its being the gift of a friend. Favours conferred by men, I acknowledge may prove burthensome. For human virtue is never perfect; and sometimes unreasonable expectations on the one side, sometimes a mortifying sense of dependence on the other, corrode in secret the pleasures of benefits, and convert the obligations of friendship into grounds of jealousy. But nothing of this kind can affect the intercourse of gratitude with Heaven. Its favours are wholly disinterested; and with a gratitude the most cordial and unuspicious, a good man looks up to that Almighty Benefactor, who aims at no end but the happiness of those whom he blesses, and who desires no return from them but a devout and thankful heart. While others can trace their prosperity to no higher source than a concurrence of worldly causes and, often, of mean or trifling incidents, which occasionally favoured their designs; with what superior satisfaction does the servant of God remark the hand of that gracious Power, which hath raised him up; which hath happily conducted him through the various steps of life, and crowned him with the most favourable distinction beyond his equals?

Let us farther consider, that not only gratitude for the past, but a cheering sense of God's favour at the present, enters into the pious emotion. They are only the virtuous, who in their prosperous days hear this voice addressed to them: *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.* He who is the Author of their prosperity gives them a title to enjoy, with complacency, his own gift. While bad men snatch the pleasures of the world as by stealth, without countenance from God the proprietor of the world; the righteous sit openly down to the feast of

life, under the smile of approving heaven. No guilty fears damp their joys. The blessing of God rests upon all that they possess; his protection surrounds them; and hence, *in the habitations of the righteous, is found the voice of rejoicing and salvation.* A lustre unknown to others, invests in their sight, the whole face of nature. Their piety reflects a sunshine from Heaven upon the prosperity of the world; unites in one point of view, the smiling aspect, both of the powers above, and the objects below. Not only have they as full a relish as others, of the innocent pleasures of life, but, moreover, in these they hold communion with God. In all that is good or fair, they trace his hand. From the beauties of nature from the improvements of art; from the enjoyments, of social life, they rise their affection to the source of all happiness which surrounds them; and thus widen the sphere of their pleasures, by adding intellectual, and spiritual, to earthly joys.

For illustration of what I have said on this head, remark that cheerful enjoyment of a prosperous state which King David had, when he wrote the twenty-third Psalm; and compare the highest pleasures of the riotous sinner, with the happy and satisfied spirit which breaths throughout that Psalm.—In the midst of the splendour of royalty, with what amiable simplicity of gratitude does he look up to the Lord as *his Shepherd*; happier in ascribing all his success to divine favour, than to the policy of his counsels, or to the force of his arms! How many instances of divine goodness arose before him in pleasing remembrance, when with such relish he speaks of the *green pastures and still waters beside which God had laid him*; of his *cup which he hath made to overflow*; and of the *table which he hath prepared for him in presence of his enemies*. With what perfect tranquility does he look forward to the time of his passing through *the valley of the shadow of death*; unappalled by that

Spectre,

Specire, whose most distant appearance blasts the prosperity of sinners! He fears no evil, as long as *the rod and the staff* of his Divine Shepherd are with him; and, through all the unknown periods of this and a of future existence, commits himself to his guidance with secure and triumphant hope. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*—What a purified, sentimental enjoyment of prosperity, is here exhibited! How different from that gross relish of worldly pleasures, which belongs to those who behold only the terrestrial side of things; who raise their views to no higher objects than the succession of human contingencies, and the weak efforts of human ability; who have no protector or patron in the heavens, to enliven their prosperity, or to warm their hearts with gratitude and trust!

II. RELIGION affords to good men peculiar security in the enjoyment of their prosperity. One of the first reflections which must strike every thinking man, after his situation in the world has become agreeable, is, That the continuance of such a situation is most uncertain. From a variety of causes, he lies open to change. On many sides he sees that he may be pierced; and the wider his comforts extend, the broader is the mark which he spreads to the arrows of misfortune. Hence many a secret alarm to the reflecting mind; and to those who reject all such alarms, the real danger increases, in proportion to their improvident security.

By worldly assistance it is vain to think of providing any effectual defence, seeing the world's mutability is the very cause of our terror. It is from a higher principle from a power superiour to the world, that relief must be sought, amidst such disquietudes of the heart. He who in his prosperity can look up to One who is witness to his inordination, humility, and charity; he who can appeal to Heaven, that he

has

has not been elated by pride, nor overcome by pleasure, but has studied to employ his gifts to the honour of the giver; this man, if there be any truth in religion, if there be any benignity or goodness in the administration of the universe, has just cause for encouragement and hope. Not that an interest in the Divine grace will perpetuate to a good man, more than to others, a life of unruffled prosperity. Change and alteration form the very essence of the world. But let the world change around him at pleasure, he has ground to hope that it shall not be able to make him unhappy. Whatever may vary God's providence is still the same; and his love to the righteous remains unaltered. If it shall be the Divine will to remove one comfort, he trusts that some other shall be given. Whatever is given, whatever is taken away, he confides, that in the last result all *shall work for his good*.

Hence, he is not disturbed, like bad men, by the instability of the world.

Dangers, which overcome others, shake not his more steady mind. He enjoys the pleasures of life pure and unallayed, because he enjoys them, as long as they last, without anxious terrors. They are not his all, his only good. He welcomes them when they arrive; and when they pass away, he can eye them, as they depart, without agony or despair. His prosperity strikes a deeper and firmer root than that of the ungodly. And for this reason he is compared in the Text, to a tree planted by the rivers of water; a tree, whose branches the tempest may indeed bend, but whose root it cannot touch; a tree, which may occasionally be stripped of its leaves and blossoms, but which still maintains its place, and in due season flourishes anew. Whereas the sinner in his prosperity, according to the allusion in the book of Job, resembles *the rush that groweth up in the mire*; a slender reed, that may flourish green for a while by the side of the brook, as long as it is cherished by the sun, and fanned by the

the breeze ; till the first bitter blast breaks its feeble stem, roots it out from its bed, and lays it in the dust. Lo ! such is the prosperity of them that forget God ; and thus their hope shall perish.

III. RELIGION forms good men to the most proper temper for the enjoyment of prosperity. A little reflection may satisfy us, that mere possession, even granting it to be secure, does not constitute enjoyment. Give a man all that is in the power of the world to bestow ; surround him with riches ; crown him with honours ; invest him, if you will, with absolute dominion ; but leave him at the same time under some secret oppression or heaviness of heart ; you bestow indeed the materials of enjoyment, but you deprive him of ability to extract it. You set a feast before him, but he wants the power of tasting it.—Hence prosperity is so often an equivocal word, denoting merely affluence of possession, but unjustly applied to the miserable possessor.

We all know the effects which any indisposition of the body, even though slight, produce on external prosperity. Visit the gayest and most fortunate man on earth, only with sleepless nights ; disorder any single organ of his senses ; corrode but one of his smallest nerves ; and you shall presently see all his gaiety vanish ; you shall hear him complain that he is a miserable creature, and express his envy of the peasant and the cottager.—And can you believe, that a disease in the soul is less fatal to enjoyment, than a disease in the animal frame ; or that a sound mind is not as essential, as a sound body, to the prosperity of man ?—Let us rate sensual gratifications as high as we please, we shall be made to feel that the seat of enjoyment is in the soul. The corrupted temper, and the guilty passions of the bad, frustrate the effect of every advantage which the world confers on them. The world may call them men of pleasure ; but of all men they are the greatest foes to pleasure. From their eagerness to grasp, they strug-

gle and destroy it. None but the temperate, the regular, and the virtuous; know how to enjoy prosperity. They bring to its comforts the manly relish of a sound uncorrupted mind. They stop at the proper point, before enjoyment degenerates into disgust, and pleasure is converted into pain. They are strangers to those complaints which flow from spleen, caprice, and all the fantastical distresses of a vitiated mind. While riotous indulgence enervates both the body and the mind, purity and virtue lighten all the powers of human fruition. Moderate and simple pleasures relish high with the temperate; in the midst of his studied refinements, the voluptuary languishes.

Wherever guilt mingles with prosperity, a certain gloom and heaviness enter along with it. Vitious intrigues never fail to entangle and embarrass those who engage in them. But innocence confers ease and freedom on the mind; leaves it open to every pleasing sensation; gives a lightness to the spirits, similar to the native gaiety of youth and health; ill imitated and ill supplied, by that forced levity of the vicious, which arises not from the health, but from the drunkenness of the mind.

Feeble are all pleasures in which the heart has no part. The selfish gratifications of the bad, are both narrow in their circle, and short in their duration. But prosperity is redoubled to a good man, by his generous use of it. It is reflected back upon him from every one whom he makes happy. In the intercourse of domestick affection; in the attachment of friends, the gratitude of dependants, the esteem and good will of all who know him, he sees blessings multiplied around him on every side. *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; Because I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart*

to sing with joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame: I was a father to the poor; and the cause, which I knew not, I searched out.—Thus while the righteous flourisheth like a tree planted by the rivers of water he bringeth forth also his fruit in his season: And that fruit, to pursue the allusion of the Text, he brings forth not for himself alone. He flourishes not like a tree in some solitary desert, which scatters its blossoms to the wind, and communicates neither fruit nor shade to any living thing: But like a tree in the midst of an inhabited country, which to some affords friendly shelter, to others, fruit; which is not only admired by all for its beauty, but blessed by the traveller for the shade, and by the hungry for the subsistence it hath given.

IV. RELIGION hightens the prosperity of good men, by the prospect which it affords them of greater happiness to come in another world. I showed, in the foregoing discourse, the mighty effect of the hope of Heaven, in relieving the mind under the troubles of life. And sure, if this hope be able to support the falling, it cannot but improve the flourishing state of man; if it can dispel the thickest gloom of adversity, it must needs enliven prosperity by the additional lustre which it throws upon it. What is present, is never sufficient to give us full satisfaction. To the present we must always join some agreeable anticipations of futurity, in order to complete our pleasure. What an accession then must the prosperity of the righteous man receive, when, born with a smooth and gentle gale along the current of life, and looking round on all the blessings of his state, he can consider these as no more than an introduction to higher scenes which are hereafter to open; he can view his present life, as only the porch through which he is to pass into the palace of bliss; and his present joys, as but a feeble stream, dispensed for his occasional refreshment, until he arrive at that river

river of life which flows at God's right hand?—Such prospects purify the mind, at the same time that they gladden it. They prevent a good man from setting too high a value on his present possessions; and thereby assist him in maintaining, amidst the temptations of worldly pleasure, that command of himself which is so essential to the wise and temperate enjoyment of prosperity.

It is the fate of all human pleasures, by continuance to fade; of most of them to cloy. Hence, in the most prosperous state, there are frequent intervals of languor, and even of dejection. There are vacuities in the happiest life, which it is not in the power of the world to fill up. What relief so adapted to those vacant or dejected periods, as the pleasing hopes which arise from immortality? How barren and imperfect that prosperity, which can have recourse to no such subsidiary comfort, in order to animate the stagnation of vulgar life, and to supply the insufficiency of worldly pleasures?

Worldly prosperity declines with declining life. In youth its relish was brisk and poignant. It becomes more sober as life advances; and flattens as life descends. He who lately overflowed with cheerful spirits and high hopes, begins to look back with heaviness on the days of former years. He thinks of his old companions, who are gone, and reviews past scenes, more agreeable than any which are likely to return. The activity of pursuit is weakened. The gaiety of amusement is fled. The gratifications of sense languish. When his accustomed pleasures, one after the other, thus steal treacherously away, what can he, who is an utter stranger to religion, and to the hope of heaven, substitute in their place?—But even in that drooping period, the promises and hopes of religion support the spirits of a good man till the latest hour. *His leaf*, it is said in the Text *shall not wither*. It shall not be in the power of time to blast

blast his prosperity: But old age shall receive him into a quiet retreat, where if lively sensations fail, gentle pleasures remain to sooth him. That hope of immortality, which formerly improved his other enjoyments, now in a great measure supplies their absence. Its importance rises, in proportion as its object draws near. He is not forsaken by the world, but retires from it with indignity; reviewing with a calm mind the part which he has acted, and trusting to the promise of God for an approaching reward. Such sentiments and expectations shed a pleasing tranquility over the old age of the righteous man. They make the evening of his days go down unclouded; and allow the stream of life, though fallen low, to run clear to the last drop.

THUS I have shown, I hope, with full evidence, what material ingredients religion and a good conscience are in the prosperity of life. Separated from them, prosperity, how fair soever it may seem to the world, is insipid, nay frequently noxious to the possessor: United with them, it rises into a real blessing bestowed by God upon man. *God giveth to man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy but to the sinner he giveth sore travel, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God.*

ALLOW me now to conclude the subject, with representing to the prosperous men of the world, those crimes and miseries into which the abuse of their condition is likely to betray them, and calling upon them to beware of the dangers with which they are threatened.

It is unfortunate for mankind, that those situations which favour pleasure, are too generally adverse to virtue. Virtue requires internal government and discipline; prosperity relaxes the mind, and inflames the passions. Virtue is supported by a regard to what is future; prosperity attaches us wholly to what is present

present. The characteristics of virtue, are modesty and humility; the most common attendants of prosperity, are pride and presumption. One should think, that prosperity would prove the strongest incitement to remember and to honour that God who bestows it. Yet such is the perverseness of human nature, that it proves much oftener the motive to impiety. The changes of the world call the attention of men to an Invisible Power. But a train of events proceeding according to their wish, leads them to nothing beyond what they see. The supreme Giver is concealed from view by his own gifts. This instance of success they ascribe to a fortunate concurrence of worldly causes; that acquisition, to their own skill and industry; unmindful of him, who from the beginning arranged that series of causes, and who placed them in circumstances where their industry could operate with success. From forgetting God, they too often proceed to despise him. All that is light or giddy in their minds, is set in motion by the gale of prosperity. Arrogance and self-sufficiency are lifted up; and their state is considered, as secured by their own strength. Hence that *pride of countenance*, through which the wicked, in their prosperity as David observes, *refuse to seek after God*. They are described as *speaking loftily, and setting their mouth against the Heavens. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ; and they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? Or what profit should we have if we pray unto him?*

They say unto God. depart from us.—What an impious voice! Could we have believed it possible, that worldly pleasures should so far intoxicate any human heart? Wretched and infatuated men! Have you ever examined on what your confidence rests?—You have said in your hearts, *You shall never be moved,*

ed; you fancy yourselves placed on a *mountain which standeth strong*. Awake from those flattering dreams, and behold how every thing totters around you! You stand on the edge of a precipice; and the ground is sliding away below your feet. In your health, life, possessions, connections, pleasures, principles of destruction work. The mine advances in secret, which saps the foundations, while you revel on the surface. No mighty effort, no long preparation of events, is needed to overturn your prosperity. By slow degrees it rose. Long time much labour; and the concurrence of many assisting causes, were necessary to rear it up; but one slight incident can entirely overthrow it. Suspicions are infused into the patron or the prince on whom you depend; and your disgrace ensues. Exercise, or amusement, kindles a fever in the veins of those whom you loved; and you are robbed of your comforts and hopes. A few grains of sand lodge themselves within you; and the rest of your life is disease and misery. Ten thousand contingences ever float on the current of life, the smallest of which, if it meet your frail bark in the passing, is sufficient to dash it in pieces.—Is this a place, is this a time, to swell with fancied security, to riot in unlawful pleasure, and, by your disregard of moral and religious duties, to brave the government of the Almighty? He hath stamped every possession of man with this inscription, *Rejoice with trembling*. Throughout every age he hath pointed his peculiar displeasure against the confidence of presumption, and the arrogance of prosperity. He hath pronounced, that *whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased*. And shall neither the admonitions which you receive from the visible inconstancy of the world, nor the declarations of the Divine displeasure, be sufficient to check your thoughtless career? Know, that by your impiety, you multiply the dangers which already threaten you on every side; you accelerate the speed with which the changes

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changes of the world advance to your destruction. The Almighty touches with his rod that edifice of dust, on which you stand, and boast of your strength; and, at that instant, it crumbles to nothing.

As men, then, bethink yourselves of human instability. As Christians, reverence the awful government of God. Insure your prosperity, by consecrating it to religion and virtue. Be humble in your elevation; be moderate in your views; be submissive to him who hath raised and distinguished you. Forget not, that on his providence you are as dependent, and to the obedience of his laws as much bound, as the meanest of your fellow-creatures. Disgrace not your station, by that grossness of sensuality, that levity of dissipation, or that insolence of rank, which bespeak a little mind. Let the affability of your behaviour, show that you remember the natural equality of men. Let your moderation in pleasure, your command of passion, and your steady regard to the great duties of life, show that you possess a mind worthy of your fortune. Establish your character on the basis of esteem; not on the flattery of dependents, or the praise of sycophants, but on the respect of the wise and the good. Let innocence preside over your enjoyments. Let usefulness and beneficence, not ostentation and vanity, direct the train of your pursuits. *Let your alms, together with your prayers, come up in memorial before God.* So shall your prosperity, under the blessing of Heaven, be *as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* So shall it resemble those celestial fires which glow above, with beneficent, with regular, and permanent lustre; and not prove that *mirth of fools*, which by Solomon is compared to *the crackling of thorns under a pot*, a glittering and fervent blaze, but speedily extinct.

On the whole, let this be our conclusion, That both in prosperity and in adversity, religion is the safest guide of human life. Conducted by its light,
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we reap the pleasures, and at the same time escape the dangers, of a prosperous state. Sheltered under its protection, we stand the shock of adversity with most intrepidity, and suffer least from the violence of the storm. *He that desireth life, and loveth many days that he may see good, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from guilt. Let him depart from evil, and do good. Let him seek peace with God, and pursue it.* Then in his adversity, God shall hide him in his pavilion. In his prosperity, he shall flourish like a tree planted by the rivers of water. The ungodly are not so; but are like the chaff, light and vile, which the wind driveth away.

S E R M O N IV.

I C O R. xiii. 12.

For now we see through a glass darkly.—

THE Apostle here describes the imperfection of our knowledge with relation to spiritual and eternal objects. He employs two metaphors, to represent more strongly the disadvantages under which we lie: One, that we see those objects *through a glass*, that is, through the intervention of a medium which obscures their glory; the other, that we see them *in a riddle* or *enigma*, which our translators have rendered by seeing them *darkly*; that is, the truth in part discovered, in part concealed, and placed beyond our comprehension.

This description, however just and true, cannot fail to occasion some perplexity to an enquiring mind. For it may seem strange that so much darkness should be left upon those celestial objects, towards which we

are at the same time commanded to aspire. We are strangers in the universe of God. Confined to that spot on which we dwell, we are permitted to know nothing of what is transacting in the regions above us and around us. By much labour, we acquire a superficial acquaintance with a few sensible objects which we find in our present habitation; but we enter, and we depart, under a total ignorance of the nature and laws of the spiritual world. One subject in particular, when our thoughts proceed in this train, must often recur upon the mind with peculiar anxiety; that is, the immortality of the soul, and the future state of man. Exposed as we are at present to such variety of afflictions, and subjected to so much disappointment in all our pursuits of happiness. Why, it may be said, has our gracious Creator denied us the consolation of a full discovery of our future existence, if indeed such an existence be prepared for us?—Reason it is true, suggests many arguments in behalf of immortality: Revelation gives full assurance of it. Yet even that Gospel which is said to have *brought life and immortality to light*, allows us to see *only through a glass darkly*. *It doth not yet appear what we shall be*. Our knowledge of a future world, is very imperfect; our ideas of it, are faint and confused. It is not displayed in such a manner, as to make an impression suited to the importance of the object. The faith even of the best men, is much inferior, both in clearness and in force, to the evidence of sense; and proves, on many occasions, insufficient to counterbalance the temptations of the present world. Happy moments indeed there sometimes are in the lives of pious men, when sequestered from worldly cares, and born upon the wings of divine contemplation, they rise to a nearer and transporting view of immortal glory. But such efforts of the mind are rare, and cannot be long supported. When the spirit of meditation subsides, this lively sense of a future

ture state decays, and though the general belief of it remain, yet even good men, when they return to the ordinary business and cares of life, seem to rejoin the multitude, and to re-assume the same hopes, and fears, and interests, which influence the rest of the world.

From such reflections, a considerable difficulty respecting this important subject, either arises, or seems to arise. Was such an obscure and imperfect discovery of another life worthy to proceed from God? Does it not afford some ground, either to tax his goodness, or to suspect the evidence of its coming from him?—This is the point which we are now to consider; and let us consider it with that close attention which the subject merits. Let us enquire, whether we have any reason, either to complain of Providence, or to object to the evidence of a future state, because that evidence is not of a more sensible and striking nature. Let us attempt humbly to trace the reasons, why, though permitted to know and to see somewhat of the eternal world, we are nevertheless permitted only to *know in part, and to see through a glass darkly.*

It plainly appears to be the plan of the Deity, in all his dispensations, to mix light with darkness, evidence with uncertainty. Whatever the reasons of this procedure be, the fact is undeniable. He is described in the Old Testament, as a *God that hideth himself. Clouds and darkness* are said to *surround him. His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters; his footsteps are not known.* Both the words and the ways of God are full of mystery. In the ordinary course of his government, innumerable events occur which perplex us to the utmost. There is a certain limit to all our enquiries in religion, beyond which if we attempt to proceed, we are lost in a maze of inextricable difficulties. Even that revelation which affords such material instruction to man concerning
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his duty and his happiness leaves many doubts unresolved. Why was it not given sooner; why not to all men; why there should be so many things in it *hard to be understood*, are difficulties not inconsiderable in the midst of that incontestable evidence by which it is supported. If, then, the future state of man be not placed in so full and clear a light as we desire this is no more than what the analogy of all religion, both natural and revealed, give us reason to expect.

But such a solution of the difficulty will be thought imperfect. It may, perhaps, not give much satisfaction, to show that all religion abounds with difficulties of a like nature. Our situation, it will be said, it so much the more to be lamented, that not on one side only we are confined in our enquiries, but on all hands environed with mysterious obscurity.—Let us then, if so much dissatisfied with our condition, give scope for once to Fancy, and consider how the plan of Providence might be rectified to our wish. Let us call upon the Septick, and desire him to say, what measure of information would afford him entire satisfaction.

This, he will tell us, requires not any long and deep deliberation. He desires only to have his view enlarged beyond the limits of his corporeal state. Instead of resting upon evidence which requires discussion, which must be supported by much reasoning, and which, after all, he alleges yields very imperfect information, he demands the everlasting mansions to be so displayed, if in truth such mansions there be, as to place faith on a level with the evidence of sense. What noble and happy effects, he exclaims, would instantly follow, if man thus beheld his present and future existence at once before him. He would then become worthy of his rank in the creation. Instead of being the sport, as now, of degrading passions and childish attachments, he would act solely on the principles of immorality. His
pursuit

pursuits of virtue would be steady; his life would be undisturbed and happy. Superiour to the attacks of distress, and the solicitations of pleasure, he would advance, by a regular progress, towards those divine rewards and honours which were continually present to his view.—Thus Fancy, with as much ease and confidence as if it were a perfect judge of creation, erects a new world to itself, and exults with admiration of its own work. But let us pause, and suspend this admiration, till we coolly examine the consequences that would follow from this supposed reformation of the universe.

CONSIDER the nature and circumstances of man. Introduced into the world in an indigent condition, he is supported at first by the care of others; and, as soon as he begins to act for himself, finds labour and industry to be necessary for sustaining his life, and supplying his wants. Mutual defence and interest give rise to society; and society, when formed, requires distinctions of property, diversity of conditions, subordination of ranks, and a multiplicity of occupations, in order to advance the general good. The services of the poor, and the protection of the rich, become reciprocally necessary. The governours, and the governed, must co-operate for general safety. Various arts must be studied; some respecting the cultivation of the mind, others, the care of the body; some to ward off the evils, and some to provide the conveniences of life. In a word, by the destination of his Creator, and the necessities of his nature, man commences, at once, an active, not merely a contemplative being. Religion assumes him as such. It supposes him employed in this world, as on a busy stage. It regulates, but does not abolish, the enterprizes and cares of ordinary life. It addresses itself to the various ranks in society; to the rich and the poor, to the magistrate and the subject. It rebukes the sloth-
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ful ; directs the diligent how to labour ; and requires every man to *do his own business*.

Suppose, now, that veil to be withdrawn which conceals another world from our view. Let all obscurity vanish ; let us no longer *see darkly, as through a glass* ; but let every man enjoy that intuitive perception of divine and eternal objects, which the Sceptick was supposed to desire. The immediate effect of such a discovery would be, to annihilate in our eye all human objects, and to produce to a total stagnation in the affairs of the world. Where the celestial glory exposed to our admiring view ; did the angelick harmony sound in our enraptured ears ; what earthly concerns could have the power of engaging our attention for a single moment ? All the studies and pursuits, the arts and labours, which now employ the activity of man, which support the order, or promote the happiness of society, would lie neglected and abandoned. Those desires and fears, those hopes and interests by which we are at present stimulated, would cease to operate. Human life would present no objects sufficient to rouse the mind ; to kindle the spirit of enterprize, or to urge the hand of industry. If the mere sense of duty engaged a good man to take some part in the business of the world, the task, when submitted to, would prove distasteful. Even the preservation of life would be slighted, if he were not bound to it by the authority of God. Impatient of his confinement within this tabernacle of dust, languishing for the happy day of his translation to those glorious regions which were displayed to his sight, he would sojourn on earth as a melancholy exile. Whatever Providence has prepared for the entertainment of man, would be viewed with contempt. Whatever is now attractive in society, would appear insipid. In a word, he would be no longer a fit inhabitant of this world, nor be qualified for those exertions which are allotted to him in his present sphere of being.

But;

But, all his faculties being sublimated above the measure of humanity, he would be in the condition of a being of superiour order, who, obliged to reside among men, would regard their pursuits with scorn, as dreams, trifles, and puerile amusements of a day.

But to this reasoning it may perhaps be replied, That such consequences as I have now stated, supposing them to follow, deserve not much regard.—For what though the present arrangement of human affairs were entirely changed, by a clearer view, and a stronger impression of our future state? Would not such a change prove the highest blessing to man? Is not his attachment to worldly objects the great source both of his misery and his guilt? Employed in perpetual contemplation of heavenly objects, and in preparation for the enjoyment of them, would he not become more virtuous, and of course more happy, than the nature of his present employments and attachments permits him to be?—Allowing, for a moment, the consequence to be such, this much is yielded, that upon the supposition which was made, man would not be the creature which he now is, nor human life the state which we now behold. How far the change would contribute to his welfare, comes to be considered.

If there be any principle fully ascertained by religion, it is, That this life was intended for a state of trial and improvement to man. His preparation for a better world required a gradual purification, carried on by steps of progressive discipline. The situation, therefore, here assigned him, was such as to answer this design, by calling forth all his active powers, by giving full scope to his moral dispositions, and bringing to light his whole character. Hence it became proper, that difficulty and temptation should arise in the course of his duty. Ample rewards were promised to virtue; but these rewards were left, as yet, in obscurity and distant prospect. The impressions

of sense were so balanced against the discoveries of immortality, as to allow a conflict between faith and sense, between conscience and desire, between present pleasure and future good. In this conflict, the souls of good men are tried, improved, and strengthened. In this field, their honours are reaped. Here are formed the capital virtues of fortitude, temperance, and self-denial; moderation in prosperity, patience in adversity, submission to the will of God, and charity and forgiveness to men, amidst the various competitions of worldly interest.

Such is the plan of Divine wisdom for man's improvement. But put the case, that the plan devised by human wisdom were to take place, and that the rewards of the just were to be now fully displayed to the view; the exercise of all those graces which I have mentioned, would be entirely superseded. Their very names would be unknown. Every temptation being withdrawn, every worldly attachment being subdued by the overpowering discoveries of eternity; no trial of sincerity, no discrimination of characters, would remain; no opportunity would be afforded for those active exertions, which are the means of purifying and perfecting the good. On the competition between time and eternity, depends the chief exercise of human virtue. The obscurity which at present hangs over eternal objects, preserves the competition. Remove that obscurity, and you remove human virtue from its place. You overthrow that whole system of discipline, by which imperfect creatures are, in this life, gradually trained up for a more perfect state.

This, then, is the conclusion to which at last we arrive, That the full display which was demanded, of the heavenly glory, would be so far from improving the human soul, that it would abolish those virtues and duties which are the great instruments of its improvement. It would be unsoitable to the character of

of man in every view, either as an active being, or a moral agent. It would disqualify him for taking part in the affairs of the world; for relishing the pleasures, or for discharging the duties of life: In a word, it would entirely defeat the purpose of his being placed on this earth. And the question, Why the Almighty has been pleased to leave a spiritual world, and the future existence of man, under so much obscurity, resolves in the end into this, Why there should be such a creature as man in the universe of God?—Such is the issue of the improvements proposed to be made on the plans of Providence. They add to the discoveries of the superiour wisdom of God; and of the presumption and folly of man.

FROM what as been said, it now appears, That no reasonable objection to the belief of a future state arises, from the imperfect discoveries of it which we enjoy; from the difficulties that are mingled with its evidence; from our *seeing as through a glass darkly*, and being left to *walk by faith and not by sight*. It cannot be otherwise, it ought not to be otherwise, in our present state. The evidence which is afforded, is sufficient for the conviction of a candid mind, sufficient for a rational ground of conduct; though not so striking as to withdraw our attention from the present world, or altogether to overcome the impression of sensible objects. In such evidence it becomes us to acquiesce, without indulging either doubts or complaints, on account of our not receiving all the satisfaction which we fondly desire, but which our present immaturity of being excludes. For upon the supposition of immortality, this life is no other than the childhood of existence; and the measures of our knowledge must be proportioned to such a state. To the successive stages of human life, from infancy to old age, belong certain peculiar attachments, certain cares, desires, and interests; which open not abruptly, but by gradual advances on the mind, as it be-

comes fit to receive them, and is prepared for acting the part to which, in their order, they pertain. Hence, in the education of a child, no one thinks of inspiring him at once with the knowledge, the sentiments, and views of a man, and with contempt for the exercises and amusements of childhood. On the contrary, employments suited to his age are allowed to occupy him. By these his powers are gradually unfolded; and advantage is taken of his youthful pursuits, to improve and strengthen his mind; till, step by step, he is led on to higher prospects, and prepared for a larger and more important scene of action.

This analogy, which so happily illustrates the present conduct of the Deity towards man, deserves attention the more, as it is the very illustration used by the Apostle, when treating of this subject in the context. Now, says he, *we know in part.*—*But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.* *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then, face to face: Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known.* Under the care of the Almighty, our education is now going on, from a mortal to a immortal state. As much light is let in upon us, as we can bear without injury. When the objects become too splendid and dazzling for our sight, the curtain is drawn. Exercised in such a field of action, as suits the strength of our unripened powers, we are, at the same time by proper prospects and hopes, prompted to aspire towards the manhood of our nature, the time *when childish things shall be put away.* But still, betwixt those future prospects, and the impression of present objects, such an accurate proportion is established, as on the one hand, shall not produce a total contempt of earthly things, while we aspire to those that are heavenly; and on the other, shall not encourage such a degree of

of attachment to our present state, as would render us unworthy of future advancement. In a word, the whole course of things is so ordered, that we may neither by any irregular and precipitate education, become men too soon; not by a fond and trifling indulgence, be suffered to continue children for ever.

Let those reflections not only remove the doubts which may arise from our obscure knowledge of immortality, but likewise produce the highest admiration of the wisdom of our Creator. The structure of the natural world affords innumerable instances of profound design, which no attentive spectator can survey without wonder. In the moral world, where the workmanship is of much finer and more delicate contexture, subjects of still greater admiration open to view. But admiration must rise to its highest point, when those parts of the moral constitution, which at first were reputed blemishes, which carried the appearance of objections, either to the wisdom or the goodness of Providence, are discovered, on more accurate inspection, to be adjusted with the most exquisite propriety. We have now seen, that the darkness of man's condition is no less essential to his well being, than the light which he enjoys. His internal powers, and his external situation, appear to be exactly fitted to each other. Those complaints which we are apt to make, of our limited capacity and narrow views, of our inability to penetrate farther into the future destination of man, are found, from the foregoing observations, to be just as unreasonable, as the childish complaints of our not being furnished with a microscope eye, nor furnished with an angel's wing; that is, of not being endowed with powers which would subvert the nature, and counteract the laws of our present state.

In order to do justice to the subject, I must observe that the same reasoning which has been now employed with respect to our knowledge of immortality,

is equally applicable to many other branches of intellectual knowledge. Thus, why we are permitted to know so little of the nature of that Eternal Being who rules the universe; why the manner in which he operates on the natural and moral world, is wholly concealed; why we are kept in such ignorance, with respect to the extent of his works, to the nature and agency of spiritual beings, and even with respect to the union between our own soul and body: To all these, and several enquiries of the same kind, which often employ the solicitous researches of speculative men, the answer is the same that was given to the interesting question which makes the subject of our discourse, the degree of knowledge desired, would prove incommensurable with the design, and with the proper business of this life. It would raise us to a sphere too exalted; would reveal objects too great and striking for our present faculties; would excite feelings too strong for us to bear; in a word, would unfit us for thinking or acting like human creatures. It is therefore reserved for a more advanced period of our nature; and the hand of Infinite wisdom hath in mercy drawn a veil over scenes which would overpower the sight of mortals.

One instance in particular, of Divine wisdom, is so illustrious, and corresponds so remarkably with our present subject, that I cannot pass it over without notice; that is the concealment under which Providence has placed the future events of our life on earth. The desire of penetrating into this unknown region, has ever been one of the most anxious passions of men. It has often seized the wise as well as the credulous, and given rise to many vain and impious superstitions throughout the whole earth. Burning with curiosity at the approach of some critical event, and impatient under the perplexity of conjecture and doubt, How cruel is Providence, we are apt to exclaim, in denying to man the power of foresight, and in limiting

ting him to the knowledge of the present moment? Were he permitted to look forward into the course of destiny, how much more suitably would he be prepared for the various turns and changes in his life? With what moderation would he enjoy his prosperity, under the fore-knowledge of an approaching reverse? And with what eagerness be prompted to improve the flying hours, by seeing the inevitable term draw nigh which was to finish his course?

But while Fancy indulges such vain desires and criminal complaints, this coveted fore-knowledge must clearly appear to the eye of reason, to be the most fatal gift which the Almighty could bestow. If in this present mixed state all the successive scenes of distress through which we are to pass, were laid before us in one view, perpetual sadness would overcast our life. Hardly would any transient gleams of intervening joy be able to force their way through the cloud. Faint would be the relish of pleasures, of which we foresaw the close: Insupportable the burthen of afflictions, under which we are oppressed by a load, not only of present, but of anticipated sorrows. Friends would begin their union, with lamenting the day which was to dissolve it; and with weeping eye, the parent would every moment behold the child whom he knew that he was to lose. In short, as soon as that mysterious veil, which now covers futurity, was lifted up, all the gaiety of life would disappear; its flattering hopes, its pleasing illusions, would vanish; and nothing but its vanity and sadness remain. The foresight of the hour of death would continually interrupt the course of human affairs; and the overwhelming prospect of the future, instead of exciting men to proper activity, would render them immoveable with consternation and dismay.—How much more friendly to man is that mixture of knowledge and ignorance which is allotted him in this state! Ignorant of the events which are

befall us, and of the precise term which is to conclude our life, by this ignorance our enjoyment of present objects is favoured; and knowing that death is certain, and that human affairs are full of change, by this knowledge our attachment to those objects is moderated. Precisely in the same manner as, by the mixture of evidence and obscurity which remains on the prospect of a future state, a proper balance is preserved betwixt our love of this life, and our desire of a better.

The longer that our thoughts dwell on this subject, the more we must be convinced, that in nothing the Divine wisdom is more admirable, than in proportioning knowledge to the necessities of man. Instead of lamenting our condition, that we are permitted only to *see as through a glass darkly*, we have reason to bless our Creator, no less for what he has concealed, than for what he hath allowed us to know. He is *wonderful in counsel, as he is excellent in working. He is wise in heart, and his thoughts are deep. How unsearchable are the riches of the wisdom of the knowledge of God!*

FROM the whole view which we have taken of the subject, this important instruction arises. That the great design of all the knowledge and in particular of the religious knowledge which God hath afforded us, is, to fit us for discharging the duties of life. No useless discoveries are made to us in religion: No discoveries even of useful truths, beyond the precise degree of information, which is subservient to right conduct. To this great end all our information points. In this center all the lines of knowledge meet. *Life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel*; yet not so displayed as to gratify the curiosity of the world with an astonishing spectacle; but only so far made known, as to assist and support us in the practice of our duty. If the discovery were more imperfect it would excite no desire of immortality

immortality; if it were more full and striking, it would render us careless of life. On the first supposition, no sufficient motive to virtue would appear; on the second no proper trial of it would remain. In the one case, we should think and act like men who have their portion only in this world; in the other case, like men who have no concern with this world at all. Whereas now, by the wise constitution of Heaven, we are placed in the most favourable situation for acting, with propriety, our allotted part here; and for rising in due course, to higher honour and happiness hereafter.

Let us then second the kind intentions of Providence, and act upon the plan which it hath pointed out. Checking our inquisitive solicitude about what the Almighty hath concealed, let us diligently improve what he hath made known. Inhabitants of the earth, we are at the same time candidates for Heaven. Looking upon these as only different views of one consistent character, let us carry on our preparation for Heaven, not by abstracting ourselves from the concerns of this world, but by fulfilling the duties and offices of every station in life. *Living soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world, let us look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Before I conclude, it may be proper to observe, That the reasonings in this discourse give no ground to apprehend any danger of our being too much influenced by the belief of a future state. I have shown the hurtful effects which would follow from too bright and full a discovery of the glory of that state; and in showing this, I have justified the decree of Providence, which permits no such discovery. But as our nature is at present constituted, attached by so many strong connections to the world of sense, and enjoying a communication so feeble and distant with the world of spirits, we need fear no danger from cultivating

vating intercourse with the latter as much as possible. On the contrary, from that intercourse the chief security of our virtue is to be sought. - The bias of our nature leans so much towards sense, that from this side the peril is to be dreaded, and on this side the defence is to be provided.

Let us then *walk by faith*. Let us strengthen this principle of action to the utmost of our power. Let us implore the Divine grace, to strengthen it within us more and more: That we may thence derive an antidote against that subtle poison, which incessant commerce with the objects of sense diffuses through our souls; that we may hence acquire purity and dignity of manners, suited to our divine hopes; and undefiled by the pleasures of the world, unshaken by its terrors may preserve to the end one constant tenour of integrity. Till at last, having, under the conduct of Christian faith, happily finished the period of discipline, we enter on that state, where a far nobler scene shall open; where eternal objects shall shine in their native splendour; where this twilight of moral life being past, the *Sun of righteousness* shall rise; and *that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away*.

S E R M O N V.

JOHN xvii. 1.

*Jesus lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father!
The hour is come;—*

TH E S E were the words of our blessed Lord on a memorable occasion. The feast of the passover drew nigh, at which he knew that he was to suffer.

suffer. The night was arrived wherein he was to be delivered into the hands of his enemies. He had spent the evening in conference with his disciples; like a dying father in the midst of his family, mingling consolations with his last instructions. When he had ended his discourse to them, he *lifted up his eyes to heaven*, and with the words which I have now read, began that solemn prayer of intercession for the Church, which closed his ministry. Immediately after, he went forth with his disciples into the garden of Gethsemane, and surrendered himself to those who came to apprehend him.

Such was the situation of our Lord at the time of his pronouncing these words. He saw his mission on the point of being accomplished. He had the prospect full before him, of all that he was about to suffer.—*Father! The hour is come:*—What hour? An hour the most critical, the most pregnant with great events, since hours had begun to be numbered, since time had begun to run. It was the hour in which the Son of God was to terminate the labours of his important life, by a death still more important and illustrious; the hour of atoning, by his suffering, for the guilt of mankind; the hour of accomplishing prophecies, types, and symbols, which had been carried on through a series of ages; the hour of concluding the old, and of introducing to the world the new dispensation of religion; the hour of his triumphing over the world, and death, and hell; the hour of his erecting that spiritual kingdom which is to last for ever. Such is the hour, such are the events which you are to commemorate in the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper. I shall attempt to set them before you as proper subjects, at this time of your devout meditation. To display them in their genuine majesty, is beyond the ability of man.

I. THIS was the hour in which Christ was glorified by his sufferings. The whole of his life had discovered

covered much real greatness, under a mean appearance. Through the cloud of his humiliation, his native lustre often broke forth, but never did it shine so bright, as in this last, this trying hour. It was indeed the hour of distress, and of blood. He knew it to be such; and when he uttered the words of the Text, he had before his eyes, the executioner and the cross, the scourge, the nails, and the spear. But by prospects of this nature, his soul was not to be overcome. It is distress which ennobles every great character; and distress was to glorify the Son of God. He was now to teach all mankind, by his example, how to suffer and to die. He was to stand forth before his enemies, as the faithful witness of the truth; justifying by his behaviour the character which he assumed, and sealing with his blood the Doctrine which he taught.

What magnanimity in all his words and actions on this great occasion! The court of Herod, the judgment-hall of Pilate, the hill of Cavalry, were so many theatres prepared for his displaying all the virtues of a constant and patient mind. When led forth to suffer, the first voice which we hear from him, is a generous lamentation over the fate of his unfortunate, though guilty, country; and, to the last moment of his life, we behold him in possession of the same gentle and benevolent spirit. No upbraiding, no complaining expression escaped from his lips, during the long and painful approaches of a cruel death. He betrayed no symptom of a weak or a vulgar, of a discomposed or impatient mind. With the utmost attention of filial tenderness, he committed his aged mother to the care of his beloved disciple. With all the dignity of a Sovereign, he conferred pardon on a penitent fellow-sufferer. With a greatness of mind beyond example, he spent his last moments in apologies and prayers for those who were shedding his blood.

By

By wonders in heaven, and wonders on earth, was this hour distinguished. All nature seemed to feel it; and the dead and the living bore witness to its importance. The veil of the temple was *rent in twain*. The earth shook. There was darkness over all the land. The graves were opened, and *many who slept arose and went into the Holy City*. Nor were these the only prodigies of this awful hour. The most hardened hearts were subdued and changed. The Judge, who in order to gratify the multitude passed sentence against him, publicly attested his innocence. The Roman centurion, who presided at the execution glorified God, and acknowledged the sufferer to be more than man. *After he saw the things which had passed, he said, Certainly this was a righteous person; truly, this was the Son of God*. The Jewish malefactor who was crucified with him, addressed him as a King, and implored his favour. Even the crowd of insensible spectators, who had come forth as to a common spectacle, and who began with clamours and insults, *returned home, smiting their breasts*. —Look back on the heroes, the philosophers, the legislators of old. View them in their last moments. Recall every circumstance which distinguishes their departure from the world. Where can you find such an assemblage of high virtues, and of great events, as concurred at the death of Christ? Where, so many testimonies given to the dignity of the dying person, by earth, and by heaven?

II. THIS was the hour in which Christ atoned for the sins of mankind, and accomplished our eternal redemption. It was the hour when that great sacrifice was offered up, the efficacy of which reaches back to the first transgression of man, and extends forward to the end of Time; the hour when, from the cross, as from an high altar, that blood was flowing, which washed away the guilt of the nations.

This

This awful dispensation of the Almighty, contains mysteries which are beyond the discovery of man. It is one of those things into which *the angels desire to look*. What has been revealed to us, is, That the death of Christ was the interposition of Heaven for preventing the ruin of human kind. We know, that under the government of God, misery is the natural consequence of guilt. After rational creatures had, by their criminal conduct, introduced disorder into the Divine kingdom, there was no ground to believe, that by their penitence and prayers alone, they could prevent the destruction which threatened them. The prevalence of propitiatory sacrifices throughout the earth, proclaims it to be the general sense of mankind, that mere repentance was not of sufficient avail to expiate sin, or to stop its penal effects. By the constant allusions which are carried on in the New Testament to the sacrifices under the Law, as pre-signifying a great atonement made by Christ; and by the strong expressions which are used in describing the effects of his death, the sacred writers show, as plainly as language allows, that there was an efficacy in his sufferings, far beyond that of mere example and instruction. The nature and extent of that efficacy we are unable, as yet, fully to trace. Part we are capable of beholding; and the wisdom of what we behold, we have reason to adore. We discern in this plan of redemption, the evil of sin strongly exhibited; and the justice of the Divine government awfully exemplified, in Christ suffering for sinners. But let us not imagine, that our present discoveries unfold the whole influence of the death of Christ. It is connected with causes into which we cannot penetrate. It produces consequences too extensive for us to explore. *God's thoughts are not as our thoughts*. In all things, we see only in part; and here, if any where, we see also *as through a glass darkly*.

This, however, is fully manifest, that redemption is one most glorious work of the Almighty. If the
hour

hour of the creation of the world was great and illustrious; that hour, when, from the dark and formless mass, this fair system of nature arose at the Divine command; when the *morning stars sang together*, and all the sons of God shouted for joy; no less illustrious is the hour of restoration of the world; the hour when, from condemnation and misery, it emerged into happiness and peace. With less external majesty it was attended, but is, on that account, the more wonderful, that under an appearance so simple, such great events were covered.

III. IN this hour, the long series of prophecies, visions, types, and figures, was accomplished. This was the center in which they all met: This the point towards which they had tended and verged, throughout the course of so many generations. You behold the Law and the Prophets standing, if we may speak so, at the foot of the cross, and doing homage. You behold Moses and Aaron bearing the ark of the covenant; David and Elijah presenting the oracle of testimony. You behold all the priests and sacrifices, all the rights and ordinances, all the types and symbols, assembled together to receive this consummation. Without the death of Christ, the worship and ceremonies of the law would have remained a pompous, but unmeaning institution. In the hour when he was crucified, *the book with the seven seals* was opened. Every rite assumed its significance; every prediction met its event; every symbol displayed its correspondence.

The dark, and seemingly ambiguous method of conveying important discoveries under figures and emblems, was not peculiar to sacred books. The Spirit of God, in pre-signifying the death of Christ, adopted that plan, according to which the whole knowledge of those early ages was propagated through the world. Under the veil of mysterious allusion, all wisdom was then concealed. From the sensible world, images were every where borrowed, to describe

scribe things unseen. More was understood to be meant, than was openly expressed. By enigmatical rites, the Priest communicated his doctrines; by parables and allegories, the Philosopher instructed his disciples, even the Legislator, by figurative sayings, commanded the reverence of the people. Agreeably to this prevailing mode of instruction, the whole dispensation of the Old Testament was so conducted, as to be the shadow and the figure of a spiritual system. Every remarkable event, every distinguished personage, under the Law, is interpreted in the New Testament, as bearing some reference to the hour of which we treat. If Isaac was laid upon the altar as an innocent victim; if David was driven from his throne by the wicked, and restored by the hand of God; if the brazen serpent was lifted up, to heal the people; if the rock was smitten by Moses to furnish drink in the wilderness; all were types of Christ and alluded to his death.

In predicting the same event, the language of ancient prophecy was magnificent, but seemingly contradictory: For it foretold a Messiah, who was to be at once a sufferer and a conqueror. *The Star was to come out of Jacob, and the Branch to spring from the stem of Jesse. The Angel of the Covenant, the Desire of all Nations, was to come suddenly to his temple; and to him was to be the gathering of people. Yet at the same time, he was to be despised and rejected of men; he was to be taken from prison and from judgment, and to be led as a lamb to the slaughter. Though he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, yet the Gentiles were to come to his light and Kings to the brightness of his rising.* In the hour when Christ died, those prophetic riddles were solved; those seeming contradictions were reconciled. The obscurity of oracles, and the ambiguity of types vanished. *The Sun of righteousness* rose; and together with the dawn of religion, those shadows passed away.

IV. THIS was the hour of the abolition of the Law; and the introduction of the Gospel; the hour of terminating the old, and of beginning the new dispensation of religious knowledge and worship, throughout the earth. Viewed in this light, it forms the most august æra which is to be found in the history of mankind. When Christ was suffering on the cross, we are informed by one of the Evangelists, that he said, *I thirst*; and that they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it to his mouth. *After he had tasted the vinegar, knowing that all things were now accomplished, and the scripture fulfilled, he said, It is finished*; that is, This offered draught of vinegar was the last circumstance predicted by an ancient Prophet, that remained to be fulfilled. The vision and the prophecy are now sealed: The Mosaic dispensation is closed. *And he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

It is finished.—When he uttered these words, he changed the state of the universe. At that moment, the Law ceased, and the Gospel commenced. This was the ever-memorable point of time, which separated the old and the new world from each other. On one side of the point of separation, you behold the Law, with its priests, its sacrifices, and its rites, retiring from sight. On the other side, you behold the Gospel, with its simple and venerable institutions, coming forward into view. Significantly was the veil of the temple rent in this hour; for the glory then departed from between the cherubims. The legal High Priest delivered up his Urim and Thummim, his breast plate, his robes, and his incense: And CHRIST stood forth as the Great High Priest of all succeeding generations. By that one sacrifice which he now offered, he abolished sacrifices for ever. Altars on which the fire had blazed for ages, were now to smoke no more. Victims were no more to bleed. *Not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with his*

his own blood, he now entered into the Holy Place, there to appear in the presence of God for us.

This was the hour of association and union to all the worshippers of God. When Christ said, *It is finished*, he threw down the wall of partition which had so long divided the Gentile from the Jew. He gathered into one, all the faithful, out of every kindred and people. He proclaimed the hour to be come when the knowledge of the true God should be no longer confined to one nation, nor his worship to one temple; but over all the earth, the worshippers of the Father should *serve him in spirit and in truth*. From that hour, they who dwelt in the *uttermost ends of the earth, strangers to the covenant of promise*, began to be *brought nigh*. In that hour, the light of the Gospel dawned from afar on the British islands.

During a long course of ages, Providence seemed to be occupied in preparing the world for this revolution. The whole Jewish œconomy was intended to usher it in. The knowledge of God was preserved unextinguished in one corner of the world, that thence, in due time, might issue forth the light which was to overspread the earth. Successive revelations gradually enlarged the views of men beyond the narrow bounds of Judæa, to a more extensive kingdom of God. Signs and miracles awakned their expectation, and directed their eyes towards this great event. Whether God descended on the flaming mountain, or spoke by the Prophet's voice; whether he scattered his chosen people into captivity, or re-assembled them in their own land; he was still carrying on a progressive plan; which was accomplished at the death of Christ.

Not only in the territories of Israel, but over all the earth, the great dispensations of Providence respected the approach of this important hour. If empires rose or fell; if war divided, or peace united the nations; if learning civilized their manners, or philosophy

losophy enlarged their views; all was, by the secret decree of Heaven, made to ripen the world for that *fulfness of time*, when Christ was to publish the whole counsel of God. The Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman Conqueror, entered upon the stage, each at his predicted period; and, *though he meant not so, neither did his heart think so*, ministered to this hour. The revolutions of power and the succession of monarchies, were so arranged by Providence, as to facilitate the progress of the Gospel through the habitable world, after the day had arrived, *when the stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands, should become a great mountain, and fill the earth*. This was the day, which *Abraham saw afar off and was glad*. This was the day, which *many Prophets and Kings, and righteous men desired to see, but could not*; the day for which *the earnest expectation of the creature, long oppressed with ignorance, and bewildered in superstition, might be justly said to wait*.

V This was the hour of Christ's triumph over all the powers of darkness; the hour in which he overthrew dominions and thrones, *led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men*. The contest which the kingdom of darkness had long maintained against the kingdom of light, was now brought to its crisis. The period was come, when *the seed of the woman, should bruise the head of the serpent*. For many ages, the most gross superstition had filled the earth. *The glory of the uncorruptable God was, every where except in the land of Judæa, changed into images made like to corruptable man, and to birds and beasts, and creeping things*. The world which the Almighty created for himself, seemed to have become a temple of idols. Even to vices and passions, altars were raised; and what was intitled Religion, was in effect a discipline of impurity. In the midst of this universal darkness, Satan had erected his throne; and the learned and polished, as well as the savage nations, bowed down before

before him. But at the hour when Christ appeared on the cross, the signal of his defeat was given. His kingdom suddenly departed from him; the reign of Idolatry passed away: He was *beheld to fall like lightning from heaven*. In that hour, the foundation of every Pagan temple shook. The statute of every false God tottered on its base. The Priest fled from his falling shrine; and the heathen oracles became dumb for ever.

As on the cross Christ triumphed over Satan, so he overcame his auxiliary, the world. Long had it assailed him with its temptations and discouragements. In this hour of severe trial, he surmounted them all. Formerly he had despised the pleasures of the world. He now baffled its terrors. Hence he is justly said to have *crucified the world*. By his sufferings, he ennobled distress; and he darkened the lustre of the pomp and vanities of life, he discovered to his followers the path which leads through affliction, to glory and to victory; and he imparted to them the same spirit which enabled him to overcome. *My kingdom is not of this world. In this world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Death also the last foe of man, was the victim of this hour. The formidable appearance of the spectre remained; but his dart was taken away. For, in the hour when Christ expiated guilt, he disarmed death, by securing the resurrection of the just. When he said to his penitent fellow-sufferer, *To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise*, he announced to all his followers the certainty of heavenly bliss. He declared the *cherubims* to be dismissed and the *flaming sword* to be sheathed, which had been appointed at the fall, *to keep from man the way of the Tree of Life*. Faint, before this period, had been the hope, indistinct the prospect, which even good men enjoyed of the heavenly kingdom. *Life and immortality were now brought*
to

to light. From the hill of Calvary, the first clear and certain view was given to the world of the everlasting mansions. Since that hour, they have been the perpetual consolation of believers in Christ. Under trouble, they sooth their minds; amidst temptation, they support their virtue; and, in their dying moments, enable them to say, *O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory?*

VI. THIS was the hour when our Lord erected that spiritual kingdom which is never to end. How vain are the counsels and designs of men! How shallow is the policy of the wicked! How short their triumphing! The enemies of Christ imagined, that in this hour they had successfully accomplished their plan for his destruction. They believed, that they had entirely scattered the small party of his followers, and had extinguished his name and his honour for ever. In derision they addressed him as a King. They clothed him with purple robes; they crowned him with a crown of thorns; they put a reed into his hand; and, with insulting mockery, bowed the knee before him. Blind and impious men! How little did they know, that the Almighty was at that moment *setting him as a King on the hill Sion; giving him the Heathen for the inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession!* How little did they know, that their badges of mock royalty were at that moment converted into the signals of absolute dominion, and the instruments of irresistible power! The reed which they put into his hands, became a *rod of iron*, with which he was to *break in pieces his enemies*; a sceptre, with which he was to *rule the universe in righteousness*. The cross, which they thought was to stigmatize him with infamy, became the *ensign of his renown*. Instead of being the reproach of his followers, it was to be their *boast and their glory*. The cross was to *shine on places and churches throughout the earth*. It was to be assumed as the distinction of the most powerful

powerful monarchs, and to wave in the banner of victorious armies, when the memory of Herod and Pilate should be accursed; when Jerusalem should be reduced to ashes, and the Jews be vagabonds over all the world.

These were the triumphs which commenced at this hour. Our Lord saw them already in their birth; he *saw of the travail of his soul, and was satisfied*. He beheld the word of God going forth, conquering, and to conquer; subduing to the obedience of his laws, the subduers of the world; carrying light into the regions of darkness, and mildness into the habitations of cruelty. He beheld the Gentles waiting below the cross, to receive the Gospel. He beheld *Ethiopia and the Isles stretching out their hands to God; the desert beginning to rejoice, and to blossom as the rose; and the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth, as the waters cover the sea*. Well pleased, he said, *It is finished*. As a conqueror, he retired from the field, reviewing his triumphs: *He bowed his head and gave up the ghost*.—From that hour, Christ was no longer a mortal man, but *Head over all things to the Church*; the glorious King of men and Angels, of whose dominion there shall be no end. His triumphs shall perpetually increase. *His name shall endure for ever; it shall last as long as the sun; men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed*.

SUCH were the transactions, such the effects of this ever-memorable hour. With all those great events was the mind of our Lord filled, when he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, *Father! the hour is come*.

From this view which we have taken of this subject, permit me to suggest, what ground it affords to confide in the mercy of God, for the pardon of sin; to trust to his faithfulness, for the accomplishment of all his promises; and to approach to him, with gratitude and devotion, in acts of worship. IN

IN the first place, The death of Christ affords us ground to confide in the Divine mercy, for the pardon of sin. All the steps of that high dispensation of Providence, which we have considered; lead directly to this conclusion. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.* This is the final result of the discoveries of the Gospel. On this rests that great system of consolation, which it hath reared up for men. We are not left to dubious and intricate reasonings, concerning the conduct which God may be expected to hold towards his offending creatures. But we are led to the view of important and illustrious facts, which strike the mind with evidence irresistible. For, is it possible to believe, that such great operations as I have endeavoured to describe, were carried on by the Almighty in vain? Did he excite, in the hearts of his creatures, such encouraging hopes, without any intention to fulfil them? After so long a preparation of goodness, could he mean to deny forgiveness, to the penitent and the humble? When, overcome by the sense of guilt, man looks up with an astonished eye to the Justice of his Creator, let him recollect that hour of which the Text speaks, and be comforted. The signals of Divine mercy, erected in his view, are too conspicuous to be either distrusted or mistaken.

IN the next place, The discoveries of this hour afford the highest reason to trust in the Divine faithfulness, for the accomplishment of every promise which remains yet unfulfilled. For this was the hour of the completion of God's ancient covenant. It was the *performance of the mercy promised to the fathers.* We behold the consummation of a great plan, which throughout a course of ages, had been uniformly pursued; and which, against every human appearance, was, at the appointed moment, exactly fulfilled. *No word that is gone out of the mouth of the Lord,*

Lord, shall fail. No length of time alters his purpose. No obstacles can retard it. Towards the ends accomplished in this hour, the most repugnant instruments were made to operate. We discern God bending to his purpose, the jarring passions, the opposite interests, and even the vices of men; uniting seeming contrarieties in his scheme; making *the wrath of man to praise him*; obliging the ambition of Princes, the prejudices of the Jews, the malice of Satan, all to concur, either in bringing forward this hour, or in completing its destined effects. With what entire confidence ought we to wait for the fulfilment of all his other promises in their due time; even when events are most embroiled, and the prospect is most discouraging? *Although thou sayest, Thou canst not see him; yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.* Be attentive only to perform thy duty; leave the event to God; and be assured, that under the direction of his Providence, *all things shall work together* for a happy issue.

LASTLY, The consideration of this whole subject tends to excite gratitude and devotion, when we approach to God in acts of worship. The hour of which I have discoursed, presents him to us in the amiable light of the Deliverer of mankind, the Restorer of our forfeited hopes. We behold the greatness of the Almighty, softened by the mild radiance of condescension and mercy. We behold him diminishing the awful distance at which we stand from his presence, by appointing for us a Mediator and Intercessor, through whom the humble may, without dismay, approach to Him who made them. By such views of the Divine nature, Christian faith lays the foundation for a worship which shall be at once rational and affectionate; a worship in which the light of the understanding shall concur with the devotion of the heart, and the most profound reverence be united with the most cordial love. Christian faith is not
a system

a system of speculative truths. It is not a lesson of moral instruction only. By a train of high discoveries which it reveals, by a succession of interesting objects which it places in our view, it is calculated to elevate the mind, to purify the affections, and, by the assistance of devotion, to confirm and encourage virtue. Such, in particular, is the scope of that divine institution, the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper. To this happy purpose let it conduce, by concentrating, in one striking point of light, all that the Gospel has displayed of what is most important to man. Touched with just contrition for past offences, and filled with a grateful sense of Divine goodness, let us come to the altar of God; and, with a humble faith in his infinite mercies, devote ourselves to his service for ever.

S E R M O N VI.

JAMES iii. 17.

The wisdom that is from above, is—gentle—

TO be wise in our own eyes, to be wise in the opinion of the world, and to be wise in the sight of God, are three things so very different, as rarely to coincide. One may often be wise in his own eyes, who is far from being so in the judgement of the world; and to be reputed a prudent man by the world, is no security for being accounted wise by God. As there is a wordly happiness, which God perceives to be no other than disguised misery; as there are wordly honours, which in his estimation are reproach; so there is a wordly wisdom, which, *in his sight, is foolishness*. Of this wordly wisdom the characters are given in the context, and placed in contrast with those of the *wisdom which is from above*. The one is the wisdom of the crafty; the other that of the upright.

The one terminates in selfishness; the other, in charity. The one is full of *strife and bitter envyings*; the other, of *mercy and of good fruits*. One of the chief characters by which the wisdom from above is distinguished, is *gentleness*, of which I am now to discourse. Of this there is the greater occasion to discourse, because it is too seldom viewed in a religious light; and is more readily considered by the bulk of men, as a mere felicity of nature, or an exterior accomplishment of manners, than as a Christian virtue which they are bound to cultivate. I shall first explain the nature of this virtue; and shall then offer some arguments to recommend, and some directions to facilitate, the practice of it.

I BEGIN with the distinguishing true gentleness from passive tameness of spirit, and from unlimited compliance with the manners of others. That passive tameness which submits, without struggle, to every incroachment of the violent and assuming, forms no part of Christian duty; but, on the contrary, is destructive of general happiness and order. That unlimited complaisance, which on every occasion, falls in with the opinions and manners of others, is so far from being a virtue, that it is itself a vice, and the parent of many vices. It overthrows all steadiness of principle: and produces that sinful conformity with the world, which taints the whole character. In the present corrupted state of human manners, always to assent and to comply, is the very worst maxim we can adopt. It is impossible to support the purity and dignity of Christian morals, without opposing the world on various occasions, even though we should stand alone. That gentleness therefore which belongs to virtue, is to be carefully distinguished from the mean spirit of cowards, and the fawning assent of sycophants. It renounces no just right from fear. It gives up no important truth from flattery.—It is indeed not only consistent with a firm mind, but
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it necessarily requires a manly spirit, and a fixed principle, in order to give it any real value. Upon this solid ground only, the polish of gentleness can with advantage be superinduced.

It stands opposed, not to the most determined regard for virtue and truth, but to harshness and severity, to pride and arrogance, to violence and oppression. It is, properly, that part of the great virtue of charity, which makes us unwilling to give pain to any of our brethren. Compassion prompts us to relieve their wants. Forbearance prevents us from retaliating their injuries. Meekness restrains our angry passions; candour, our severe judgments. Gentleness corrects whatever is offensive in our manners; and, by a constant train of humane attentions, studies to alleviate the burthen of common misery. Its office, therefore, is extensive. It is not, like some other virtues, called forth only on peculiar emergencies; but it is continually in action, when we are engaged in intercourse with men. It ought to form our address, to regulate our speech, and to diffuse itself over our whole behaviour.

I must warn you, however, not to confound this gentle *wisdom which is from above*, with that artificial courtesy, that studied smoothness of manners, which is learned in the school of the world. Such accomplishments, the most frivolous and empty may possess. Too often they are employed by the artful, as a snare; too often affected by the hard and unfeeling, as a cover to the baseness of their minds. We cannot, at the same time, avoid observing the homage, which, even in such instances, the world is constrained to pay to virtue. In order to render society agreeable, it is found necessary to assume somewhat, that may at least carry its appearance. Virtue is the universal charm. Even its shadow is courted, when the substance is wanting. The imitation of its form has been reduced into an art; and, in the commerce

of life, the first study of all who would either gain the esteem, or win the hearts of others, is to learn the speech, and to adopt the manners, of candour, gentleness and humanity. But that gentleness which is the characterick of a good man, has, like every other virtue, its seat in the heart. And, let me add, nothing except what flows from the heart, can render even external manners truly pleasing. For no assumed behaviour can at all times hide the real character. In that unaffected civility which springs from a gentle mind, there is a charm infinitely more powerful, than in all the studied manners of the most finished courtier.

True gentleness is founded on a sense of what we owe to him who made us, and to the common nature of which we all share. It arises from reflection on our own failings and wants; and from just views of the condition, and the duty of man. It is native feeling, heightened and improved by principle. It is the heart which easily relents; which feels for every thing that is human; and is backward and slow to inflict the least wound. It is affable in its address, and mild in its demeanour; ever ready to oblige, and willing to be obliged by others; breathing habitual kindness towards friends, courtesy to strangers, long-suffering to enemies. It exercises authority with moderation; administers reproof with tenderness; confers favours with ease and modesty. It is unassuming in opinion, and temperate in zeal. It contends not eagerly about trifles; slow to contradict, and still slower to blame; but prompt to allay dissention, and to restore peace. It neither intermeddles unnecessarily with the affairs, nor pries inquisitively into the secrets of others. It delights above all things to alleviate distress, and, if it cannot dry up the falling tear, to sooth at least the grieving heart. Where it has not the power of being useful, it is never burdensome. It seeks to please, rather
than

than to shine and dazzle; and conceals with care that superiority, either of talents, or of rank, which is oppressive to those who are beneath it. In a word it is that spirit, and that tenor of manners, which the gospel of Christ enjoins, when he commands us to *bear one another's burthens; to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep; to please every one his neighbour for his good; to be kind and tender-hearted; to be pitiful and courteous; to support the weak, and to be patient towards all men.*

Having now sufficiently explained the nature of this amiable virtue, I proceed to recommend it to your practice. Let me for this end, desire you to consider the duty which you owe to God; to consider the relation which you bear to one another; to consider your own interest.

I. CONSIDER the Duty which you owe to God. When you survey his works, nothing is so conspicuous, as his greatness and majesty. When you consult his word, nothing is more remarkable, than his attention to soften that greatness, and to place it in the mildest and least oppressive light. He not only characterizes himself as the *God of consolation*, but, with condescending gentleness, he particularly accommodates himself to the situation of the unfortunate. *He dwelleth with the humble and contrite. He hideth not his face when the afflicted cry. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.*—When his Son came to be the Saviour of the world, he was eminent for the same attribute of mild and gentle goodness. Long before his birth, it was prophesied of him, that he should *not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; that the bruised reed he should not break, nor quench the smoking flax:* And after his death, this distinguishing feature in his character was so universally remembered, that the Apostle Paul, on occasion of a request which he makes to the Corinthians, uses those remarkable expressions,

I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. During all his intercourse with men, no harshness, or pride, or stately distance, appeared in his demeanour. In his access, he was easy; in his manners, simple; in his answers, mild; in his whole behaviour, humble and obliging. *Learn of me*, said he, *for I am meek and lowly in heart.*—As the Son of God is the patren, so the Holy Ghost is the inspirer of gentleness. His name is *the Comforter, the Spirit of grace and peace*, His fruits or operations on the human mind, are *love, meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering*. Thus, by every discovery of the Godhead, honour is conferred upon gentleness. It is held up to our view, as peculiarly connected with Celestial Nature. And suitable to such discoveries, is the whole strain of the Gospel. It were unnecessary to appeal to any single precept. You need only open the New Testament, to find this virtue perpetually inculcated. Charity or love, is the capital figure ever presented to our view; and gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness, are the sounds ever recurring on our ear.

So predominant, indeed is this spirit throughout the Christian dispensation, that even the vices and corruptions of men have not been able altogether to defeat its tendency. Though that dispensation is far from having hitherto produced its full effect upon the world, yet we can clearly trace its influence in humanizing the manners of men. Remarkable, in this respect, is the victory which it has gained over those powers of violence and cruelty, which belong to the infernal kingdom. Wherever Christianity prevails, it has discouraged, and, in some degree, abolished slavery. It has rescued human nature from that ignominious yoke, under which in former ages, the one half of mankind groaned. It has introduced more equality between the two sexes, and rendered the conjugal union more rational and happy. It has abated the ferociousness of war.

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It has mitigated the rigour of despotism, mitigated the cruelty of punishments; in a word, has reduced mankind, from their ancient barbarity, into a more humane and gentle state.—Do we pretend respect and zeal for this religion, and at the same time allow ourselves in that harshness and severity, which are so contradictory to its genius? Too plainly we show, that it has no power over our hearts. We may retain the Christian name; but we have abandoned the Christian spirit.

II. CONSIDER the relation which you bear to one another. Man is a solitary individual, is a very wretched being. As long as he stands detached from his kind, he is possessed, neither of happiness, nor of strength. We are formed by nature to unite; we are impelled towards each other, by the compassionate instincts in our frame; we are linked by a thousand connections, founded on common wants. Gentleness therefore; or, as it is very properly termed, humanity, is what man, as such in every station, owes to man. To be inaccessible, contemptuous, and hard of heart, is to revolt against our own nature; is in the language of scripture, *to hide ourselves from our own flesh*. Accordingly, as all feel the claim which they have to mildness and humanity, so all are sensibly hurt by the want of it in others. On no side are we more vulnerable. No complaint is more feelingly made, than that of the harsh and rugged manners of persons with whom we have intercourse. But how seldom do we transfer the case to ourselves, or examine how far we are guilty of inflicting on others, whose sensibility is the same with ours, those very wounds of which we so loudly complain?

But, perhaps, it will be pleaded by some. That this gentleness, on which we now insist, regards only those smaller offices of life, which in their eye are not essential to religion and goodness. Negligent,

they confess, on slight occasions, of the government of their temper, or the regulation of their behaviour, they are attentive, as they pretend, to the great duties of beneficence; and ready whenever the opportunity presents, to perform important services to their fellow-creatures. But let such persons reflect that the occasions of performing those important good deeds, very rarely occur. Perhaps their situation in life, or the nature of their connections, may in a great measure exclude them from such opportunities. Great events give scope for great virtues; but the main tenour of human life, is composed of small occurrences. Within the round of these, lie the materials of the happiness of most men; the subjects of their duty, and the trials of their virtue. Virtue must be formed and supported, not by unfrequent acts, but by daily and repeated exertions. In order to its becoming either vigorous or useful, it must be habitually active; not breaking forth occasionally with a transient lustre, like the blaze of a comet; but regular in its returns like the light of day: Not like the aromatic gale, which sometimes feasts the sense; but like the ordinary breeze, which purifies the air, and renders it healthful.

Years may pass over our heads, without affording any opportunity for acts of high beneficence, or extensive utility. Whereas not a day passes, but in the common transactions of life, and especially in the intercourse of domestic society, gentleness finds place for promoting the happiness of others, and for strengthening in ourselves the habit of virtue. Nay, by seasonable discoveries of a human spirit, we sometimes contribute more materially to the advancement of happiness, than by actions which are seemingly more important. There are situations, not a few, in human life, where the encouraging reception, the condescending behaviour, and the look of sympathy, bring greater relief to the heart, than the most bountiful

bountiful gift. While on the other side, when the hand of liberality is extended to bestow, the want of gentleness is sufficient to frustrate the intention of the benefit. We sour those whom we meant to oblige; and, by conferring favours with ostentation and harshness, we convert them into injuries. Can any disposition then be held to possess a low place in the scale of virtue, whose influence is so considerable on the happiness of the world?

Gentleness is, in truth, the great avenue to mutual enjoyment. Amidst the strife of interfering interests, it tempers the violence of contention, and keeps alive the seeds of harmony. It softens animosities; renews endearments; and renders the countenance of man, a refreshment to man. Banish gentleness from the earth; suppose the world to be filled with none but harsh and contentious spirits; and what sort of society would remain? The solitude of the desert were preferable to it. The conflict of jarring elements in chaos; the cave, where subterraneous winds contend and roar; the den where serpents hiss, and beasts of the forest howl; would be the only proper representations of such assemblies of men.—*O that I had wings like a dove! for then I would fly away, and be at rest. Lo! then I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness; I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest: For I have seen violence and strife in the city. Mischief and sorrow are in the midst of it: Deceit and guile depart not from the streets.*—Strange! that where men have all one common interest, they should so often, absurdly concur in defeating it! Has not Nature already provided a sufficient quantity of unavoidable evils for the state of man? As if we did not suffer enough from the storm which beats upon us without, must we conspire also, in those societies where we assemble, in order to find a retreat from that storm, to harass one another?—But if the sense of duty, and

of common happiness, be insufficient to recommend the virtue of which we treat, then let me desire you,

III. To consider your own interest. Whatever ends a good man can be supposed to pursue, gentleness will be found to favour them. It prepossesses and wins every heart. It persuades, when every other argument fails; often disarms the fierce, and melts the stubborn. Whereas harshness confirms the opposition it would subdue; and, of an indifferent person, creates an enemy. He who could overlook an injury committed in the collision of interests, will long and severely resent the slights of a contemptuous behaviour. To the man of gentleness, the world is generally disposed to ascribe every other good quality. The higher endowments of the mind we admire at a distance; and when an impropriety of behaviour accompanies them, we admire without love. They are like some of the distant stars, whose beneficial influence reaches not to us. Whereas, of the influence of gentleness, all in some degree partake, and therefore all love it. The man of this character rises in the world without struggle, and flourishes without envy. His misfortunes are universally lamented; and his failings are easily forgiven.

But whatever may be the effect of this virtue on our external condition, its influence on our internal enjoyment is certain and powerful. That inward tranquillity which it promotes, is the first requisite to every pleasurable feeling. It is the calm and clear atmosphere, the serenity and sun-shine of the mind. When benignity and gentleness reign within, we are always least in hazard of being ruffled from without; every person, and every occurrence, are beheld in the most favourable light. But let some clouds of disgust and ill-humour gather on the mind; and immediately the scene changes; Nature seems transformed; and the appearance of all things is blackened to our view. The gentle mind is like the smooth
stream

stream, which reflects every object in its just proportion, and in its fairest colours. The violent spirit, like troubled waters, renders back the images of things distorted and broken; and communicates to them all, that disordered motion which arises solely from its own agitation.

Offences must come. As soon may the waves of the sea cease to roll, as provocations to arise from human corruption and frailty. Attacked by great injuries, the man of mild and gentle spirit will feel what human nature feels; and will defend and resent, as his duty allows him. But to those slight provocations and frivolous offences, which are the most frequent causes of disquiet, he is happily superiour. Hence his days flow in a far more placid tenour than those of others; exempted from the numberless discomposures which agitate vulgar minds. Inspired with higher sentiments; taught to regard, with indulgent eye, the frailties of men, the omissions of the careless, the follies of the imprudent, and the levity of the fickle, he retreats into the calmness of his spirit, as into an undisturbed sanctuary; and quietly allows the usual current of life to hold its course.

This virtue has another, and still more important connection with our interest, by means of that relation which our present behaviour bears to our eternal state. Heaven is the region of gentleness and friendship; Hell, of fierceness and animosity. If then, as the scripture instructs us, *according to what we now sow we must hereafter reap*; it follows, that the cultivation of a gentle temper is necessary to prepare us for heavenly felicity; and that the indulgence of harsh dispositions, is the introduction to future misery. Men, I am afraid, too often separate those articles of their belief which relate to eternity, from the ordinary affairs of the world. They connect them with the seasons of seriousness and gravity. They leave them with much respect, as in a high region,

to which, only on great occasions, they resort; and, when they descend into common life, consider themselves as at liberty to give free scope to their humours and passions. Whereas, in fact, it is their, behaviour in the daily train of social intercourse, which, more than any other cause, fixes and determines their spiritual character; gradually instilling those dispositions, and forming those habits, which affect their everlasting condition. With regard to trifles, perhaps, their malignant dispositions may chiefly be indulged. But let them remember well, that those trifles, by increasing the growth of peevishness and passion, become pregnant with the most serious mischiefs; and may fit them, before they are aware, for being the future companions of none but infernal spirits.

I mean not to say, that in order to our preparation for Heaven, it is enough to be mild and gentle; or that this virtue alone, will cover all our sins. Through the felicity of natural constitution, a certain degree of this benignity may be possessed by some, whose hearts are in other respects corrupt, and their lives irregular. But what I mean to assert, is, That where no attention is given to the government of temper, meetness for Heaven is not yet acquired, and the regenerating power of religion is as yet unknown. One of the first works of the Spirit of God, is, to infuse into every heart which it inhabits, that *gentle wisdom which is from above*. *They who are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts*; but let it not be forgotten, that among the *works of the flesh, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, and envyings*, are as expressly enumerated, as *uncleanneſs, murders, drunkenneſs, and revelling*. They who continue either in the one or the other, *shall not inherit*, indeed cannot inherit, *the kingdom of God*.

Having thus shown the importance of gentleness, both as a moral virtue, and as a Christian grace, I shall

shall conclude the subject, with briefly suggesting some considerations which may be of use to facilitate the practice of it.

FOR this end, let me advise you to view your character with an impartial eye; and to learn, from your own failings, to give that indulgence which in your turn you claim. It is pride which fills the world with so much harshness and severity. In the fulness of self-estimation, we forget what we are. We claim attentions, to which we are not entitled. We are rigorous to offences, as if we had never offended; unfeeling to distress, as if we knew not what it was to suffer. From those airy regions of pride and folly, let us descend to our proper level. Let us survey the natural equality on which Providence has placed man, with man, and reflect on the infirmities common to all. If the reflection on natural equality and mutual offences be insufficient to prompt humanity, let us at least remember what we are in the sight of God. Have we none of that forbearance to give to one another, which we all so earnestly intreat from Heaven? Can we look for clemency or gentleness from our Judge, when we are so backward to show it to our own brethren?

Accustom yourselves, also, to reflect on the small moment of those things which are the usual incentives to violence and contention. In the ruffled and angry hour; we view every appearance through the false medium. The most inconsiderable point of interest, or honour, swells into a momentous object; and the slightest attack seem to threaten immediate ruin. But after passion or pride has subsided, we look round in vain for the mighty mischiefs we dreaded. The fabric, which our disturbed imagination had reared, totally disappears. But though the cause of contention has dwindled away, its consequences remain. We have alienated a friend; we have embittered an enemy; we have sown the seeds of future suspicion, malevolence,

malevolence, or disgust.—Suspend your violence. I beseech you, for a moment, when causes of discord occur. Anticipate that period of coolness, which, of itself, would soon arrive. Allow yourselves to think, how little you have any prospect of gaining by fierce contention; but how much of the true happiness of life you are certain throwing away. Easily, and from the smallest chink, the bitter waters of strife are let forth; but their course cannot be foreseen; and he seldom fails of suffering most from their poisonous effects, who first allowed them to flow.

But gentleness will, most of all, be promoted by frequent views of those great objects which our holy religion presents. Let the prospects of immortality fill your minds. Look upon this world as a state of passage. Consider yourselves as engaged in the pursuit of higher interests; as acting now, under the eye of God; an introductory part to a more important scene. Elevated by such sentiments, your minds will become calm and sedate. You will look down as from a superiour station, on the petty disturbances of the world. They are the selfish, the sensual, and vain, who are most subject to the impotence of passion. They are linked so closely to the world; by so many sides they touch every object, and every person around them, that they are perpetually hurt, and perpetually hurting others. But the spirit of true religion removes us to a proper distance from the grating objects of worldly contention. It leaves us sufficiently connected with the world, for acting our part in it with propriety; but disengages us from it so far, as to weaken its power of disturbing our tranquillity. It inspires magnanimity; and magnanimity always breaths gentleness. It leads us to view the follies of men with pity, not with rancour; and to treat, with the mildness of a superiour nature what in little minds would call forth all the bitterness of passion.

Aided by such considerations, let us cultivate that gentle wisdom which is; in so many respects, important both to our duty and our happiness. Let us assume it as the ornament of every age, and of every station. Let it temper the petulance of youth, and soften the moroseness of old age. Let it mitigate authority in those who rule, and promote difference among those who obey. I conclude with repeating the caution, not to mistake for true gentleness, that slimzy imitation of it, called polished manners, which often, among the men of the world, under a smooth appearance, conceals much asperity. Let yours be native gentleness of heart, flowing from the love of God, and the love of man. Unite this amiable spirit, with a proper zeal for all that is right, and just, and true. Let piety be combined in your character with humanity. Let determined integrity dwell in a mild and gentle breast. A character thus supported will command more real respect, than can be procured by the most shining accomplishments, when separated from virtue.

S E R M O N VII.

ESTHER V. 13.

Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.

THES E are the words of one, who, though high in station and power, confessed himself to be miserable. They relate to a memorable occurrence in the Persian history, under the reign of Ahasuerus, who is supposed to be the Prince known among the Greek historians by the name of Artaxerxes.

xes. Ahasuerus had advanced to the chief dignity of his kingdom Haman an Amalekite, who inherited all the ancient enmity of his race to the Jewish nation. He appears, from what is recorded of him, to have been a very wicked minister. Raised to greatness without merit, he employed his power solely for the gratification of his passions. As the honours which he possessed were next to royal, his pride was every day fed with that servile homage which is peculiar to Asiatic courts; and all the servants of the King prostrated themselves before him. In the midst of this general adulation, one person only stooped not to Haman. This was Mordecai the Jew; who knowing this Amalekite to be an enemy to the people of God, and with virtuous indignation, despising that insolence of prosperity with which he saw him lifted up, *bowed not, nor did him reverence.* On this appearance of disrespect from Mordecai, Haman was full of wrath; but he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Personal revenge was not sufficient to satisfy him. So violent and black were his passions, that he resolved to exterminate the whole nation to which Mordecai belonged. Abusing for this cruel purpose, the favour of his credulous Sovereign, he obtained a decree to be sent forth, that, against a certain day, all the Jews throughout the Persian dominions should be put to the sword. Mean while, confident of success, and blind to approaching ruin, he continued exulting in his prosperity. Invited by Ahasuerus to a royal banquet, which Esther the Queen had prepared, *he went forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart.* But behold how slight an incident was sufficient to poison his joy! As he went forth, he saw Mordecai in the King's gate; and observed that still he refused to do him homage: *He stood not up, nor was moved for him:* although he well knew the formidable designs which Haman was preparing to execute. One private man, who despised his

greatness

greatness, and disdained submission, while a whole kingdom trembled before him; one spirit, which the utmost stretch of his power could neither subdue nor humble, blasted his triumphs. His whole soul was shaken with a storm of passion. Wrath, pride, and desire of revenge, rose into fury. With difficulty he restrained himself in public; but as soon as he came to his own house, he was forced to disclose the agony of his mind. He gathered together his friends and family, with Zerish his wife. *He told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the King had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the King. He said moreover, Yea, Esther the Queen did let no man come in with the King, unto the banquet, that she had prepared, but myself; and to-morrow also I am invited unto her with the King. After all this preamble, what is the conclusion?—Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew, sitting at the King's gate.*

The sequel of Haman's history I shall not now pursue. It might afford matter for much instruction, by the conspicuous justice of God in his fall and punishment. But contemplating only the singular situation in which the Text presents him, and the violent agitation of his mind which it displays, the following reflections naturally arise, which together with some practical improvements, shall make the subject of this discourse. I. How miserable is vice, when one guilty passion creates so much torment! II. How unavailing is prosperity, when, in the height of it, a single disappointment can destroy the relish of all its pleasures! III. How weak is human nature, which, in the absence of real, is thus prone to form to itself imaginary woes!

I. How miserable is vice, when one guilty passion is capable of creating so much torment! When we discourse to you of the internal misery of sinners; when

when we represent the pangs which they suffer, from violent passions, and a corrupted heart; we are sometimes suspected of chusing a theme for declamation, and of heightening the picture which we draw, by colours borrowed from fancy. They whose minds are, by nature, happily tranquil, or whose situation in life removes them from the disturbance and tumult of passion, can hardly conceive, that as long as the body is at ease, and the external condition prosperous, any thing which passes within the mind should cause such exquisite woe. But, for the truth of our assertions, we appeal to the history of mankind. We might reason from the constitution of the rational frame; where the understanding is appointed to be supreme, and the passions to be subordinate; and where, if this due arrangement of its parts be overthrown, misery as necessarily ensues, as pain is consequent in the animal frame, upon the distortion of its members. But laying speculations of this kind aside, it is sufficient to lead you to the view of facts, the import of which can neither be controverted, nor mistaken. This is, indeed, the great advantage of history, that it is a mirror which holds up mankind to their own view. For, in all ages, human nature has been the same. In the circle of worldly affairs, the same characters and situations are perpetually returning; and in the follies and passions, the vices and crimes, of the generations that are past, we read those of the present.

Attend, then, to the instance now before us; and conceive, if you can, a person more thoroughly wretched, than one reduced to make this humiliating confession, that though surrounded with power, opulence and pleasure, he was lost to all happiness, through the fierceness of his resentment; and was at that moment stung by disappointment, and torn by rage, beyond what he could bear. *All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting*

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at the King's gate. Had this been a soliloquy of Haman's within himself, it would have been a sufficient discovery of his misery. But when we consider it as a confession which he makes to others, it is a proof that his misery was become insupportable. For such agitations of the mind every man strives to conceal, because he knows they dishonour him. Other griefs and sorrows, he can, with freedom, pour out to a confidant. What he suffers from the injustice or malice of the world, he is not ashamed to acknowledge. But when his suffering arises from the bad dispositions of his own heart; when, in the height of prosperity, he is rendered miserable, solely by disappointed pride, every ordinary motive for communication ceases. Nothing but the violence of anguish, can drive him to confess a passion which renders him odious, and a weakness which renders him despicable. To what extremity, in particular, must he be reduced, before he can disclose to his own family the infamous secret of his misery? In the eye of his family every man wishes to appear respectable, and to cover from their knowledge whatever may vilify or degrade him. Attacked or reproached abroad, he consoles himself with his importance at home; and in domestic attachment and respect, seeks for some compensation for the injustice of the world. Judge, then, of the degree of torment which Haman endured, by its breaking through all these restraints, and forcing him to publish his shame before those, from whom all men seek most to hide it. How severe must have been the conflict which he underwent within himself, before he called together his wife and all his friends for this purpose! How dreadful the agony he suffered at the moment of his confession, when, to the astonished company, he laid open the cause of his distress!

Assemble all the evils which poverty, disease or violence can inflict, and their stings will be found by far less

less pungent, than those which such guilty passions dart into the heart. Amidst the ordinary calamities of the world, the mind can exert its powers, and suggest relief: And the mind is properly the man; the sufferer, and his sufferings, can be distinguished. But those disorders of passion, by seizing directly on the mind, attack human nature in its strong hold, and cut off its last resource. They penetrate to the very seat of sensation; and convert all the powers of thought into instruments of torture.

Let us remark, in the event that is now before us, the awful hand of God; and admire his justice, in thus making the sinner's *own wickedness to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him*. Scepticks reason in vain against the reality of divine government. It is not a subject of dispute. It is a fact which carries the evidence of sense, and displays itself before our eyes. We see the Almighty manifestly *pursuing the sinner with evil*. We see him connecting with every single deviation from duty, those wounds of the spirit which occasion the most exquisite torment. He hath not merely promulgated his laws now, and delayed the distribution of rewards and punishments until a future period of being. But the sanctions of his laws already take place; their effects appear; and with such infinite wisdom are they contrived, as to require no other executioners of justice against the sinner, than his own guilty passions. God needs not come forth from his secret place, in order to bring him to punishment. He needs not call thunder down from the heavens, nor raise any minister of wrath from the abyss below. He needs only say, *Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone*: And, at that instant, the sinner becomes his own tormentor. The infernal fire begins, of itself, to kindle within him. The worm that never dies, seizes on his heart.

Let us remark also, from this example, how imperfectly we can judge from external appearances, concerning

concerning real happiness or misery. All Persia, it is probable, envied Haman as the happiest person in the empire; while yet, at the moment of which we now treat, there was not within its bounds, one more thoroughly wretched. We are seduced, and deceived by that false glare which prosperity sometimes throws around bad men. We are tempted to imitate their crimes, in order to partake of their imagined felicity. But remember Haman, and beware of the snare. Think not, when you behold a pageant of grandeur displayed to public view, that you discern the ensign of certain happiness. In order to form any just conclusion, you must follow the great man into the retired apartment, where he lays aside his disguise. You must not only be able to penetrate into the interior of families, but you must have a faculty by which you can look into the inside of hearts. Were you endowed with such a power, you would most commonly behold good men, in proportion to their goodness, satisfied and easy; you would behold atrocious sinners, always restless and unhappy.

Unjust are our complaints, of the promiscuous distribution made by Providence, of its favours among men. From superficial views such complaints arise. The distribution of the goods of fortune, indeed, may often be promiscuous; that is, disproportioned to the moral characters of men; but the allotment of real happiness is never so. *For to the wicked there is no peace. They are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. They travel with pain all their days. Trouble and anguish prevail against them. Terrors make them afraid on every side. A dreadful sound is in their ears; and they are in great fear where no fear is.*—Hitherto we have considered Haman under the character of a very wicked man, tormented by criminal passions. Let us now consider him, merely as a child of fortune, a prosperous man of the world; and proceed to observe.

II. How

II. How unavailing worldly prosperity is, since, in the midst of it, a single disappointment is sufficient to embitter all its pleasures. We might at first imagine, that the natural effect of prosperity would be to diffuse over the mind a prevailing satisfaction, which the lesser evils of life could not ruffle or disturb. We might expect, that as one in the full glow of health, despises inclemency of weather; so one in possession of all the advantages of high power and station, should disregard slight injuries; and at perfect ease within himself, should view, in the most favourable light, the behaviour of others around him. Such effects would indeed follow, in worldly prosperity contained in itself the true principles of human felicity. But as it possesses them not, the very reverse of those consequences generally obtains. Prosperity debilitates, instead of strengthening the mind. Its most common effect is, to create an extreme sensibility to the slightest wound. It fomenters impatient desires; and raises expectations which no success can satisfy. It fosters a false delicacy, which sickens in the midst of indulgence. By repeated gratification, it blunts the feelings of men to what is pleasing; and leaves them unhappily acute to whatever is uneasy. Hence, the gale which another would scarcely feel, is to the prosperous, a rude tempest. Hence, the rose-leaf doubled below them on the couch, as is told of the effeminate Sybarite, breaks their rest. Hence, the disrespect shown by Mordecai, preyed with such violence on the heart of Haman. Upon no principle of reason can we assign a sufficient cause for all the distress which this incident occasioned to him. The cause lay not in the external incident. It lay within himself; it arose from a mind disordered by prosperity.

Let this example correct that blind eagerness, with which we rush to the chace of worldly greatness and honours. I say not, that it should altogether divert

us from pursuing them; since, when enjoyed with temperance and wisdom, they may doubtless both enlarge our utility, and contribute to our comfort. But let it teach us not to over-rate them. Let it convince us, that unless we add to them the necessary correctives of piety and virtue, they are, by themselves, more likely to render us wretched, than to make us happy.

Let the memorable fate of Haman suggest to us also, how often, besides corrupting the mind, and engendering internal misery, they lead us among precipices, and betray us into ruin. At the moment when fortune seemed to smile upon him, with the most serene and settled aspect she was digging in secret the pit for his fall. Prosperity was weaving around his head the web of destruction. Success inflamed his pride; pride increased his thirst of revenge; the revenge which, for the sake of one man, he sought to execute on a whole nation, incensed the Queen; and he is doomed to suffer the same death which he had prepared for Mordecai.—Had Haman remained in a private station, he might have arrived at a peaceable old age. He might have been, I shall not say, a good or happy man, yet probably far less guilty, and less wretched, than when placed at the head of the greatest empire in the East. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?*

An extensive contemplation of human affairs, will lead us to this conclusion, That among the different conditions and ranks of men, the balance of happiness is preserved in a great measure equal; and that the high and low, the rich and the poor, approach, in point of real enjoyment, much nearer to each other, than is commonly imagined. In the lot of man, mutual compensations both of pleasure and of pain, universally take place. Providence never intended, that any state here should be either completely happy,

or entirely miserable. If the feelings of pleasure are more numerous, and more lively, in the higher departments of life, such also are those of pain. If greatness flatters our vanity, it multiplies our dangers. If opulence increases, our gratifications, it increases, in the same proportion, our desires and demands. If the poor are confined to a more narrow circle, yet within that circle lie most of those natural satisfactions, which, after all the refinements of art, are found to be the most genuine and true. In a state therefore, where there is neither so much to be coveted on the one hand, nor to be dreaded on the other, as at first appears, How submissive ought we to be to the disposal of Providence! How temperate in our desires and pursuits! How much more attentive to preserve our virtue, and to improve our minds, than to gain the doubtful and equivocal advantages of worldly prosperity!—But now, laying aside the consideration of Haman's great crimes; laying aside his high posterity; viewing him simply as a man, let us observe, from his history.

III. How weak human nature is, which, in the absence of real, is thus prone to create to itself imaginary woes. *All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.*—What was it, O Haman! to thee though Mordecai had continued to sit there, and neglected to do thee homage? Would the banquet have been on that account the less magnificent, thy palace less splendid, or thy retinue less numerous? Could the disrespect of an obscure stranger dishonour the favourite of a mighty King? In the midst of a thousand submissive courtiers, was one sullen countenance an object worthy of drawing thy notice, or of troubling thy repose?—Alas! in Haman we behold too just a picture of what often passes within ourselves. We never know what it is to be long at ease. Let the world cease from changing around us. Let external things keep that situation in which we most wish them to remain;

remain; yet somewhat from within shall soon arise, to disturb our happiness. A *Mordecai* appears, or seems to appear, *sitting at the gate*. Some vexation, which our fancy has either entirely created, or at least has unreasonably aggravated, corrodes us in secret; and until that be removed, all that we enjoy *availeth us nothing*. Thus, while we are incessantly complaining of the vanity and the evils of human life, we make that vanity, and we increase those evils. Unskilled in the art of extracting happiness from the objects around us, our ingenuity solely appears in converting them into misery.

Let it not be thought, that troubles of this kind are incident only to the great and the mighty. Though they, perhaps, from the intemperance of their passions, are peculiarly exposed to them; yet the disease itself belongs to human nature, and spreads through all ranks. In the humble and seemingly quiet shade of private life, discontent broods over its imaginary sorrows; preys upon the citizen, no less than upon the courtier; and often nourishes passions, equally malignant in the cottage and in the palace. Having once seized the mind, it spreads its own gloom over every surrounding object; it every where searches out materials for itself; and in no direction more frequently employs its unhappy activity, than in creating divisions amongst mankind, and in magnifying slight provocations into mortal injuries. Those self-created miseries, imaginary in the cause, but real in the suffering, will be found to form a proportion of human evils, not inferiour, either in severity or in number, to all that we endure from the unavoidable calamities of life. In situations where much comfort might be enjoyed, this man's superiority, and that man's neglect, our jealousy of a friend, our hatred of a rival, an imagined affront, or a mistaken point of honour, allow us no repose. Hence discords in families, animosities among friends, and wars among

nations. Hence, Haman miserable in the midst of all that greatness could bestow. Hence, multitudes in the most obscure stations, for whom Providence seemed to have prepared a quiet life, no less eager in their petty broils, nor less tormented by their passions, than if princely honours were the prize for which they contended.

FROM this train of observation, which the Text has suggested, can he avoid reflecting upon the disorder in which human nature plainly appears at present to lie? We have beheld, in Haman, the picture of that misery which arises from evil passions; of that unhappiness, which is incident to the highest prosperity; of that discontent, which is common to every state. Whether we consider him as a bad man, a prosperous man, or simple as a man, in every light we behold reason too weak for passion. This is the source of the reigning evil; this is the root of the universal disease. The story of Haman only shows us, what human nature has too generally appeared to be in every age. Hence, when we read the history of nations, what do we read but the history of the follies and crimes of men? We may dignify those recorded transactions, by calling them the intrigues of statesmen, and the exploits of conquerors; but they are, in truth, no other than the efforts of discontent to escape from its misery, and the struggles of contending passions among unhappy men. The history of mankind has been a continued tragedy; the world, a great theatre exhibiting the same repeated scene, of the follies of men shooting forth into guilt, and of their passions fermenting, by a quick process, into misery.

But can we believe, that the nature of man came forth in this state, from the hands of its gracious Creator? Did he frame this world, and store it with inhabitants, solely that it might be replenished with crimes and misfortunes?—In the moral, as well as in the natural world, we may plainly discern the signs of some violent

violent convulsion, which has shattered the original workmanship of the Almighty. Amidst this wreck of human nature, traces still remain which indicate its Author. Those high powers of conscience and reason, that capacity for happiness, that ardour of enterprize, that glow of affection, which often break through the gloom of human vanity and guilt, are like the scattered columns, the broken arches, and defaced sculptures of some fallen temple, whose ancient splendour appears amidst its ruin. So conspicuous in human nature are those characters, both of a high origin, and of a degraded state, that, by many religious sects throughout the earth, they have been seen and confessed. A tradition seems to have prevailed almost all nations, that the human race had either through some offence forfeited, or through some misfortune lost, that station of primæval honour which they once possessed. But while, from this doctrine, ill understood, and involved in many fabulous tales, the nations wandering in Pagan darkness could draw no consequences that were just; while, totally ignorant of the nature of the disease, they sought in vain for the remedy; the same divine revelation, which has informed us in what manner our apostacy arose, from the abuse of our rational powers, has instructed us also how we may be restored to virtue and to happiness.

LET us, therefore, study to improve the assistance which this revelation affords, for the restoration of our nature, and the recovery of our felicity. With humble and grateful minds, let us apply to those medicinal springs which it hath opened, for curing the disorders of our heart and passions. In this view, let us, with reverence, look up to that Divine Personage, who descended into this world, on purpose to be *the light and the life of men*: who came, in the fullness of grace and truth, to *repair the desolations of many generations*, to restore order among the works

of God, and to raise up a *new earth, and new heavens, wherein righteousness should dwell for ever.* Under his tuition let us put ourselves; and, amidst the storms of passion to which we are here exposed, and the slippery paths which we are left to tread, never trust presumptuously to our own understanding. Thankful that a Heavenly Conductor vouchsafes his aid, let us earnestly pray, that from him may descend divine light to guide our steps, and divine strength to fortify our minds. Let us pray, that his grace may keep us from all intemperate passions, and mistaken pursuits of pleasure; that whether it shall be his will to give or to deny us earthly prosperity, he may bless us with, a calm, a sound, and well-regulated mind; may give us moderation in success, and fortitude under disappointment; and may enable us so to take warning from the crimes and miseries of others, as to escape the snares of guilt.

WHILE we thus maintain a due dependence on God, let us also exert ourselves with care in acting our own part. From the whole of what has been said, this important instruction arises, That the happiness of every man depends more upon the state of his own mind, than upon any one external circumstance; nay, more than upon all external things put together. We have seen, that inordinate passions are the great disturbers of life; and that, unless we possess a good conscience, and a well-governed mind, discontent will blast every enjoyment; and the highest prosperity will prove only disguised misery. Fix then this conclusion in your minds, that the destruction of your virtue, is the destruction of your peace. *Keep thy heart with all diligence; govern it with the greatest care; for out of it are issues of life.* In no station, in no period, think yourselves secure from the dangers which springs from your passions. Every age, and every station, they beset; from youth to grey hairs, and from the peasant to the prince.

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At your first setting out in life, especially, when yet unacquainted with the world and its snares, when every pleasure enchants with its smile, and every object shines with the gloss of novelty; beware of the seducing appearances which surround you, and recollect what others have suffered from the power of headstrong desire. If you allow any passion, even though it be esteemed innocent, to acquire an absolute ascendant, your inward peace will be impaired. But if any, which has the taint of guilt, take early possession of your mind, you may date from that moment the ruin of your tranquillity. Nor with the season of youth does the peril end: To the impetuosity of youthful desire, succeed the more sober, but no less dangerous, attachments of advancing years; when the passions which are connected with interest and ambition begin their reign, and too frequently extend their malignant influence, even over those periods of life which ought to be most tranquil. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline must never be relaxed, of guarding the heart from the dominion of passion. Eager passions, and violent desires, were not made for man. They exceed his sphere. They find no adequate objects on earth; and of course can be productive of nothing but misery. The certain consequence of indulging them is, that there shall come an evil day, when the anguish of disappointment shall drive us to acknowledge, that all which we enjoy *availeth us nothing*.

You are not to imagine, that the warnings which I have given in this discourse, are applicable only to the case of such signal offenders as he was, of whom the Text treats. Think not, as I am afraid too many do, that, because your passions have not hurried you into atrocious deeds, they have therefore wrought no mischief, and have left no sting behind them. By a continued series of loose, though appa-

rently trivial, gratifications, the heart is often thoroughly corrupted, as by the commission of any one of those enormous crimes which sprang from great ambition, or great revenge. Habit gives the passions strength, while the absence of glaring guilt seemingly justifies them; and, unawakened by remorse, the sinner proceeds in his course, till he wax bold in guilt, and become ripe for ruin. For by gradual and latent steps, the destruction of our virtue, advances. Did the evil unveil itself at the beginning; did the storm which is to overthrow our peace, discover, as it rose, all its horrors, precautions would more frequently be taken against it. But we are imperceptably betrayed; and from one licentious attachment, one criminal passion, are, by a train of consequences, drawn on to another, till the government of our minds is irrecoverably lost. The enticing and the odious passions are, in this respect, similar in their process; and though by different roads, conduct at last to the same issue. David, when he first beheld Bathsheba, did not plan the death of Uriah. Haman was not delivered up all at once to the madness of revenge. His passions rose with the rising tide of prosperity; and pride compleated what prosperity began. What was originally no more than displeasure at Mordecai's disrespect, increased with every invitation he received to the banquet of the Queen; till it impelled him to devise the slaughter of a whole nation, and ended in a degree of rage, which confounded his reason, and hurried him to ruin. In this manner every criminal passion, in its progress, swells and blackens; and what was at first a small cloud, such as the Prophet's servant saw, *no bigger than man's hand, rising from the sea*, is soon found to carry the tempest in its womb.

S E R M O N VIII.

E C C L E S. vi. 12.

Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?

THE measure according to which knowledge is dispensed to man, affords conspicuous proofs of divine wisdom. In many instances we clearly perceive, that either more or less would have proved detrimental to his state; that entire ignorance would have deprived him of proper motives to action; and that complete discovery would have raised him to a sphere too high for his present powers. He is therefore, permitted to *know only in part; and to see through a glass, darkly.* He is left in that state of conjecture, and partial information, which, though it may occasionally subject him to distress, yet, on the whole, conduces most to his improvement; which affords him knowledge sufficient for the purposes of virtue, and of active life, without disturbing the operations of his mind, by a light too bright and dazzling. This evidently holds, with respect to that decree of obscurity which now covers the great laws of Nature, the decrees of the Supreme Being, the state of the invisible world, the future events of our own life, and the thoughts and designs which pass within the breasts of others.

But there is an ignorance of another kind, with respect to which the application of this remark may appear more dubious; the ignorance under which men labour concerning their happiness in the present life, and the means of attaining it. If there be foundation for Solomon's complaint in the Text, *who*

knoweth what is good for man in this life? this consequence may be thought inevitably to follow, That the *days of his life* must be *vain* in every sense; not only because they are fleeting, but because they are empty too, like the *shadow*. For, to what purpose are all his labours in the pursuit of an object, which it is not in his power to discover or ascertain?—Let us then seriously enquire, what account can be given of our present ignorance, respecting what is good for us in this life; whether nothing be left, but only to wander in uncertainty amidst this darkness, and to lament it as the sad consequence of our fallen state; or whether such instructions may not be derived from it, as give ground for acknowledging, that by this, as by all its other appointments, the wisdom of Providence brings real good out of seeming evil. I shall, in order, to determine this point, first, endeavour to illustrate the doctrine of the Text, That we know not, or at most know imperfectly, *what is good for us in this life*: I shall next explain the causes to which this defect in our knowledge is owing; And then shall show the purposes which it was intended to serve, and the effects which it ought to produce on our conduct.

THE whole history of man kind seems a comment on the doctrine of the Text. When we review the course of human affairs, one of the first objects which every where attracts our notice, is, the mistaken judgment of men concerning their own interest. That *fore evil*, which Solomon long ago remarked with respect to riches, of their being *kept by the owners thereof to their hurt*, takes place equally with respect to dominion and power, and all the splendid objects and high stations of life. We every day behold men climbing, by painful steps, to that dangerous height, which, in the end, renders their fall more severe, and their ruin more conspicuous. But it is not to high stations that the doctrine of the Text

is limited. In the crimes by which too often these are gained, and in the misfortunes which they afterwards bring forth, the greater part of every audience may think themselves little concerned. Leaving such themes, therefore, to the poet and the historian, let us come nearer to ourselves, and survey the ordinary walk of life.

Around us, we every where behold a busy multitude. Restless and uneasy in their present situation, they are incessantly employed in accomplishing a change of it; and, as soon as their wish is fulfilled, we discern, by their behaviour, that they are as dissatisfied as they were before. Where they expected to have found a paradise, they find a desert. The man of business pines for leisure. The leisure for which he had longed, proves an irksome gloom; and, through want of employment, he languishes, sickens, and dies. The man of retirement fancies no state to be so happy, as that of active life. But he has not engaged long in the tumults and contests of the world, unill he finds cause to look back with regret on the calm hours of his former privacy and retreat. Beauty, wit, eloquence, and fame, are eagerly desired by persons in every rank of life. They are the parent's fondest wish for his child; the ambition of the young, and the admiration of the old. And yet in what numberless instances have they proved, to those who possessed them, no other than shining snares; seductions to vice, instigations to folly, and in the end, sources of misery? Comfortably might their days have passed, had they been less conspicuous. But the distinctions which brought them forth to notice, conferred splendour, and withdrew happiness. Long life is, of all others, the most general, and seemingly the most innocent, object of desire. With respect to this too, we so frequently err, that it would have been a blessing to many to have had their wish denied. There was a period, when
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they might have quitted the stage with honour, and in peace. But by living too long, they outlived their reputation; outlived their family, their friends, and comforts; and reaped nothing from the continuance of days, except to feel the pressure of age, to taste the dregs of life, and to behold a wider compass of human misery.

Man walketh in a vain show. His fears are often as vain as his wishes. As what flattered him in expectation, frequently wounds him in possession; so the event to which he looked forward with an anxious and fearful eye, has often, when it arrived, laid its terrors aside; nay, has brought in its train unexpected blessings. Both good and evil are beheld at a distance, through a perspective which deceives. The colours of objects when nigh, are entirely different from what they appeared, when they were viewed in futurity.

THE fact then being undoubtedly certain, that it is common for men to be deceived in their prospects of happiness, let us next enquire into the causes of that deception. Let us attend to those peculiar circumstances in our state, which render us such incompetent judges of future good or evil in this life.

First, We are not sufficiently acquainted with ourselves, to foresee our future feelings. We judge by the sensations of the present moment: and, in fervour of desire, pronounce confidently concerning the desired object. But we reflect not, that our minds, like our bodies, undergo great alteration from the situations into which they are thrown, and the progressive stages of life through which they pass. Hence, concerning any condition which is yet untied, we conjecture with much uncertainty. In imagination, we carry our present wants, inclinations, and sentiments, into the state of life to which we aspire. But no sooner have we entered on it, than our sentiments and inclinations change. New wants and desires arise;
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new objects are required to gratify them; and by consequence our old dissatisfaction returns, and the void, which was to have been filled, remains as great as it was before.

But, next, supposing our knowledge of ourselves sufficient to direct us in the choice of happiness, yet still we are liable to err, from our ignorance of the connections which subsist between our own condition and that of others. No individual can be happy, unless the circumstance of those around him be so adjusted as to conspire with his interest. For, in human society, no happiness or misery stands unconnected and independent. Our fortunes are interwoven by threads innumerable. We touch one another on all sides. One man's misfortune or success, his wisdom or his folly, often, by its consequences, reaches through multitudes. Such a system is far too complicated for our arrangement. It requires adjustments beyond our skill and power. It is a chaos of events, into which our eye cannot pierce; and is capable of regulation, only by him who perceives at one glance the relation of each to all.

Farther, As we are ignorant of the events which will arise from the combination of our circumstances with those of others, so we are equally ignorant of the influence which the present-transactions of our life may have upon those which are future. The important question is not, What is good for a man one day; but what is *good for him all the days of his life*? Not, what will yield him a few scattered pleasures; but what will render his life happy on the whole amount? And is he able to answer that question, who knoweth not what *one day may bring forth*; who cannot tell, whether the events of it may not branch out into consequences, which will assume a direction quite opposite to that in which they set forth, and spread themselves over all his life to come? There is not any present moment that is unconnected with
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some future one. The life of every man is a continued chain of incidents, each link of which hangs upon the former. The transition from cause to effect, from event to event, is often carried on by secret steps, which our foresight cannot divine, and our sagacity is unable to trace. Evil may, at some future period, bring forth good; and good may bring forth evil, both equally unexpected. Had the Patriarch, Joseph, continued to loiter under his father's fond indulgence, he might have lived an obscure and insignificant life. From the pit and the prison, arose the incidents which made him the ruler of Egypt, and a saviour of his father's house.

Lastly, Supposing every other incapacity to be removed, our ignorance of the dangers to which our spiritual state is exposed, would disqualify us for judging soundly concerning our true happiness. Higher interests, than those of the present world, are now depending. All that is done or suffered by us here, ultimately refers to that immortal world, for which good men are trained up, under the care of an Almighty Parent. We are as incompetent judges of the measures necessary to be pursued for this end, as children are, of the proper conduct to be held in their education. We foresee the dangers of our spiritual, still less than we do those of our natural state; because we are less attentive to trace them. We are still more exposed to vice than to misery; because the confidence which we place in our virtue, is yet worse founded than that which we place in our wisdom. Can you esteem him prosperous, who is raised to a situation which flatters his passion, but which corrupts his principles, disorders his temper, and, finally, overleets his virtue? In the ardour of pursuit, how little are these effects foreseen? And yet, how often are they accomplished, by a change of condition? Latent corruptions are called forth; seeds of guilt are quickened into life: a growth of crimes arise, which,
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had it not been for the fatal culture of prosperity, would never have seen the light. How often is man, boastful as he is of reason, merely the creature of his fortune ; formed, and moulded, by the incidents of his life ?—Hazeal, when yet a private man, detested the thoughts of cruelty. *Thou shalt slay the young men with the sword, said the Prophet : Thou shalt dash the children, and rip up the women with child. Is thy servant a dog, replied Hazeal, that he should do those things?* But no sooner was he cloathed with the coveted purple, than it seemed to taint his nature. He committed the crimes of which, at a distance, he believed himself incapable ; and became the bloody tyrant, whose character his soul once abhorred.

SUCH then at present is man ; thus incapable of pronouncing with certainty concerning his own good or evil. Of futurity he discerns little ; and even that little he sees through a cloud. Ignorant of the alteration which his sentiments and desires will undergo from new situations in life ; ignorant of the consequences which will follow from the combination of his circumstances with those of others around him ; ignorant of the influence which the present may have on the future events of his life ; ignorant of the effect which a change of condition may produce, on his moral character, and his eternal interests ; how can he know *what is good for him all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?*

Instead of only lamenting this ignorance, let us, in the last place, consider how it ought to be improved ; what duties it suggests, and what wise end it was intended by Providence to promote.

I. LET this doctrine teach us to proceed with caution and circumspection, through a world where evil so frequently lurks under the form of good. To be humble and modest in opinion, to be vigilant and attentive in conduct, to distrust fair appearances, and to restrain rash desires, are instructions which the darkness

darkness of our present state should strongly inculcate. God hath appointed our situation to be so ambiguous, in order both to call forth the exertion of those intelligent powers which he hath given us, and to enforce our dependence on his gracious aid. *It is not in man that walketh, to direct his steps.* Surrounded with so many bewildering paths, among which the wisest are ready to stray, how earnestly should we implore, and how thankfully should we receive, that divine illumination which is promised in scripture to the pious and the humble! *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. He will guide them with his council, He will teach them the way that they should chuse.* But what must be the fate of him, who amidst all the dangers attending human conduct, neither looks up to Heaven for direction, nor properly exerts that reason which God hath given him? if to the most diligent enquirer, it proves so difficult a task to distinguish true good, from those fallacious appearances with which it is ever blended, how should he discover it, who brings neither patience nor attention to the search; who applies to no other counsellor than present pleasure, and, with a rash and credulous mind, delivers himself up to every suggestion of desire?

This admonition I particularly direct to those, who are in a period of life too often characterized by forward presumption, and headlong pursuit. The self-conceit of the young, is the great source of those dangers to which they are exposed; and it is peculiarly unfortunate, that the age which stands most in need of the council of the wise, should be the most prone to contemn it. Confident in the opinions which they adopt, and in the measures they pursue, they seem as if they understood Solomon to say, not, *Who knoweth*, but, *Who is ignorant of what is good for man all the days of his life?* The bliss to be aimed at, is, in their opinion, fully appearant. It

is not the danger of mistake, but the failure of success, which they dread. Activity to seize, not sagacity to discern, is the only requisite which they value.—How long shall it be, ere the fate of your predecessors in the same course, teach you wisdom? How long shall the experience of all ages, continue to lift its voice to you in vain? Beholding the ocean on which you are embarked, covered with wrecks, are not those fatal signals sufficient to admonish you of the hidden rock? if in paradise itself, there was a tree which bore fruit fair to the eye, but mortal in its effects, how much more in this fallen state, may such deceiving appearances be expected to abound! The whole state of Nature is now become a scene of delusion to the sensual mind. Hardly any thing is what it appears to be: And what flatters most, is always farthest from reality. There are voices which sing around you; but whose strains allure to ruin. There is a banquet spread, where poison is in every dish. There is a couch which invites you to repose; but to slumber upon it, is death. In such a situation, *be not high minded but fear.* Let sobriety temper your unwary ardour. Let modesty check your rash presumption, Let wisdom be the offspring of reflection now, rather than the fruit of bitter experience hereafter.

II. LET our ignorance of what is good or evil, correct anxiety about worldly success. As rashness is the vice of youth, the opposite extreme of immoderate care is the vice of advancing years. The doctrine which I have illustrated, is equally adapted for checking both. Since we are so often betrayed into evil, by the mistaken pursuit of good care and attention are requisite, both in forming our choice, and in conducting our pursuit; but since our attention and care are liable to be so often frustrated, they should never be allowed to deprive us of tranquility.

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The ignorance in which we are left concerning good and evil, is not such as to supercede prudence in conduct: For wisdom is still found to *excel folly, as far as light excelleth darkness*. But it is that degree of uncertainty, which ought to render us temperate in pursuit; which ought to calm the perturbation of hope and fear, and to cure the pain of anxiety. Anxiety is the poison of human life. It is the parent of many sins, and of more miseries. In a world where every thing is so doubtful; where you may succeed in your wish, and be miserable; where you may be disappointed, and be blest in the disappointment; what means this restless stir and commotion of mind? Can your solicitude alter the course, or unravel the intricacy of human events? Can your curiosity pierce through the cloud which the Supreme Being hath made impenetrable to mortal eye?—To provide against every apparent danger, by the employment of the most promising means, is the office of wisdom. But at this point wisdom stops. It commands you to retire, after you have done all that was incumbent on you, and to possess your mind in peace. By going beyond this point, by giving yourselves up to immoderate concern about unknown events, you can do nothing to advance your success, and you do much to ruin your peace. You plant within your breast the thorn which is long to gally you. To the vanity of life, you add a vexation of spirit, which is wholly of your own creation, not of Divine appointment. For the dubious goods of this world were never designed by God to raise such eager attachment. They were given to man for his occasional refreshment, not for his chief felicity. By setting an excessive value upon objects which were intended only for your secondary regard, you change their nature. Seeking more satisfaction from them than they are able to afford, you receive less than they might give. From a mistaken care to secure
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your happiness, you bring upon yourselves certain misery.

III. **LET** our ignorance of good and evil, determine us to follow Providence, and to resign ourselves to God. One of the most important lessons which can be given to man, is a resignation to his Maker; and nothing inculcates it more, than the experience of his own inability to guide himself.—You know not what is good for you, in the future periods of life. But God perfectly knows it; and if you faithfully serve him, you have reason to believe that he will always consult it. Before him lies the whole succession of events, which are to fill up your existence. It is in his power to arrange and moddle them at his pleasure; and so to adapt one thing to another, as to fulfil his promise of making them *all work together for good to those who love him*. Here then, amidst the agitations of desire, and the perplexities of doubt, is one fixed point of rest. By this let us abide; and dismiss our anxiety about things uncertain and unknown. *Acquaint yourselves with God, and be at peace. Secure the one thing needful.* Study to acquire an interest in the Divine favour: And you may safely surrender yourselves to the Divine administration.

When tempted to repine at your condition, reflect how uncertain it is, whether you should have been happier in any other. Remembering the vanity of many of your former wishes, and the fallacy which you have so often experienced in your schemes of happiness, be thankful that you are placed under a wiser direction than your own. Be not too particular in your petitions to Heaven, concerning your temporal interests. Suffer God to govern the world according to his own plan; and only pray, that he would bestow what his unerring wisdom sees to be best for you on the whole. In a word, *Commit your way unto the Lord. Trust in him and do good. Follow wherever*

wherever his Providence leads; comply with whatever his will requires; and leave all the rest to him.

IV. LET our ignorance of what is good for us in this life, prevent our taking any unlawful step, in order to compass our most favourite designs. Were the sinner bribed with any certain and unquestionable advantage; could the means which he employs ensure his success, and could that success ensure his comfort; he might have some apology to offer for deviating from the path of virtue. But the doctrine which I have illustrated, deprives him of all excuse, and places his folly in the most striking light. He climbs the steep rock, and treads on the edge of a precipice, in order to catch a shadow. He has cause to dread, not only the uncertainty of the event which he wishes to accomplish, but the nature also of that event when accomplished. He is not only liable to that disappointment of success, which so often frustrates all the designs of men; but liable to a disappointment still more cruel, that of being successful and miserable at once. Riches and pleasures are the chief temptations to criminal deeds, yet those riches, when obtained, may very possibly overwhelm him with unforeseen miseries. Those pleasures may cut short his health and life. And is it for such doubtful and fallacious rewards, that the deceiver fills his mouth with lies, the friend betrays his benefactor, the apostate renounces his faith, and the assassin covers himself with blood?

Whoever commits a crime, incurs a certain evil, for a most uncertain good. What will turn to his advantage in the course of this life he cannot with any assurance know. But this he may know, with full certainty, that by breaking the Divine commandments he will draw upon his head that displeasure of the Almighty which shall crush him for ever. The advantages of this world, even when innocently gained, are uncertain blessings; when obtained by
criminal

criminal means, they carry a curse in their bosom. To the virtuous, they are often no more than chaff. To the guilty, they are always poison.

V. LET our imperfect knowledge of what is good or evil, attach us the more to those few things, concerning which there can be no doubt of their being truly good. Of temporal things which belong to this class, the catalogue, it must be confessed, is small. Perhaps the chief worldly good we should wish to enjoy, is a sound mind in a sound body. Health and peace, a moderate fortune, and a few friends, sum up all the undoubted articles of temporal felicity. Wise was the man who addressed this prayer to God; *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me. Least I be full and deny thee, and say who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.* He whose wishes, respecting the possessions of this world are the most reasonable and bounded, is likely to lead the safest, and for that reason, the most desirable life. By aspiring too high we frequently miss the happiness, which by a less ambitious aim, we might have gained. High happiness on earth is rather a picture which the imagination forms, than a reality which man is allowed to possess.

But with regard to spiritual felicity, we are not confined to such humble views. Clear and determinate objects are proposed to our pursuit; and full scope is given to the most ardent desire. The forgiveness of our sins, and the assistance of God's holy grace to guide our life; the improvement of our minds, in knowledge and wisdom, in piety and virtue; the protection and favour of the great Father of all of the blessed Redeemer of mankind, and the Spirit of sanctification and comfort; these are objects in the pursuit of which there is no room for hesitation and distrust, nor any ground for the question in my

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Tent, *Who knoweth what is good for man?* Had Providence spread an equal obscurity over happiness of every kind, we might have had some reason to complain of the vanity of our condition. But we are not left to so hard a fate. The Son of God hath descended from heaven, to be the *Light of the world*. He hath removed that veil which covered true bliss from the search of wandering mortals, and hath taught them the way which leads to life. Worldly enjoyments are shown to be hollow and deceitful, with an exprefs intention to direct their affections towards those which are spiritual. The same discoveries which diminish the value of the one, serve to increase that of the other. Finally,

VI. LET our ignorance of what is good or evil here below, lead our thoughts and desires to a better world. I have endeavoured to vindicate the wisdom of Providence, by shewing the many useful purposes which this ignorance at present promotes. It serves to check presumption and rashness and to enforce a diligent exertion of our rational powers, joined with an humble dependence on Divine aid. It moderates eager passions respecting worldly success. It inculcates resignation to the disposal of Providence which is much wiser than man. It restrains us from employing unlawful means, in order to compass our most favourite designs. It tends to attach us more closely to those things which are unquestionably good. It is therefore such a degree of ignorance as suits the present circumstances of man better than more complete information concerning good and evil.

At the same time, the causes which render this obscurity necessary, too plainly indicate a broken or corrupted state of human nature. They shew this life to be a state of trial. They suggest the ideas of a land of pilgrimage, not of the house of rest. Low minded and base is he, who aspires to no higher portion; who could be satisfied to spend his whole existence,

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in chasing treacherous appearances of good, which so often mock his pursuit. What shadow can be more vain than the life of the greater part of mankind? Of all the eager and bustling crowd which we behold on the earth, how few discover the path of true happiness; How few can we find, whose activity has not been misemployed, and whose course terminates not in confessions of disappointments? Is this the state, are these the habitations, to which a rational spirit, with all its high hopes, and great capacities, is to be limited for ever?—Let us bless that God who hath set noble prospects before us; who, by the death and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ, hath begotten us to the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptable, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens. Let us shew ourselves worthy of such a hope, by setting our affections upon the things above, not upon things on the earth. Let us walk by faith and not by sight; and, amidst the obscurity of this faint and dubious twilight, console ourselves with the expectation of a brighter day which is soon to open. This earth is the land of shadows. But we hope to pass into the world of realities; where the proper objects of human desire shall be displayed; where the substance of that bliss shall be found, whose image only we now pursue; where no falacious hopes shall any longer allure, no smiling appearance shall betray, no insidious joys shall sting; but where truth shall be inseparably united with pleasure; and the mists which hang over this preliminary state being dissipated, the perfect knowledge of good shall lead to the full enjoyment of it for ever.

S E R M O N IX.

P S A L M iv. 4.

Commune with your own heart, upon your bed, and be still.

MUCH communing with themselves there has always been among mankind; though frequently, God knows, to no purpose, or to a purpose worse than none. Could we discover the employments of men, in retirement, how often should we find their thoughts occupied with subjects, which they would be ashamed to own? What a large share have ambition and avarice, at some times the grossest passions, and at other times the meanest trifles, in the solitary musings? They carry the world, with all its vices, into their retreat; and may be said to dwell in the midst of the world, even when they seem to be alone.

This surely is not that sort of communion which the Psalmist recommends. For this is not properly *communing with our heart*, but rather holding secret intercourse with the world. What the Psalmist means to recommend, is religious recollection; that exercise of thought which is connected with the precept given in the proceeding words, to *stand in awe, and sin not*. It is to commune with ourselves, under the character of spiritual and immortal beings; and to *ponder those paths of our feet*, which are leading us to eternity. I shall in the first place, shew the advantages of such serious retirement and meditation: and shall, in the second place, point out some of the principle subjects which ought to employ us in our retreat.

The advantages of retireing from the world, to *commune with our heart*, will be found to be great, whether we regard our happiness in this world, or our preparation for the world to come. L E T

Let us consider them, first, with respect to our happiness in this world. It will readily occur to you, that an entire retreat from wordly affairs, is not what religion requires; nor does it even enjoin a great retreat from them. Some stations of life would not permit this; and there are few stations which render it necessary. The chief field, both of the duty and of the improvement of man, lies in active life. By the grace and virtues which he exercises amidst his fellow-creatures, he is trained up for heaven. A total retreat from the world, is so far from being, as the Roman Catholic Church holds, the perfection of religion, that, some particular cases excepted, it is no other than the abuse of it.

But though entire retreat would lay us aside from the part from which Providence chiefly intended us, it is certain, that without occasional retreat, we must act that part very ill. There will be neither consistency in the conduct, nor dignity in the character, of one who sets apart no share of his time for meditation and reflection. In the heat and bustle of life, while passion is every moment throwing false colours on the objects around us, nothing can be viewed in a just light. If you wish that Reason should exert her native power, you must step aside from the crowd, into the cool and silent shade. It is there that, with sober and steady eye, she examines what is good or ill, what is wise or foolish, in human conduct; she looks back on the past, she looks forward to the future; and forms plans, not for the present moment only, but for the whole of life. How should that man discharge any part of his duty aright, who never suffers his passion to cool? And how should his passions cool, who is engaged without interruption, in the tumult of the world? This incessant stir may be called, the perpetual drunkenness of life. It raises that eager fermentation of spirit, which will be ever sending forth the dangerous fumes of rashness and folly.

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Whereas he who mingles religious retreat with worldly affairs, remains calm and master of himself. He is not whirled round, and rendered giddy, by the agitation of the world; but, from that sacred retirement, in which he has been conversant among higher objects, comes forth into the world with manly tranquility, fortified by principles which he has formed, and prepared for whatever may befall.

As he who is unacquainted with retreat, cannot sustain any character with propriety, so neither can he enjoy the world with any advantage. Of the two classes of men who are most apt to be negligent of this duty, the men of pleasure, and the men of business, it is hard to say which suffer most, in point of enjoyment, from that neglect. To the former every moment appears to be lost, which partakes not of the vivacity of amusement. To connect one plan of gaiety with another, is their sole study; till, in a very short time, nothing remain but to tread the same beaten round: to enjoy what they have already enjoyed, and to see what they have often seen. Pleasures thus drawn to the dregs, become vapid and tasteless. What might have pleased long, if enjoyed with temperance, and mingled with retirement, being devoured with such eager haste, speedily surfeits and disgusts. Hence, these are the persons, who after having run through a rapid course of pleasure, after having glittered for a few years in the foremost line of public amusements, are the most apt to fly at last to a melancholy retreat; not led by religion or reason, but driven by disappointed hopes, and exhausted spirits, to the pensive conclusion, that *all is vanity*.

If uninterrupted intercourse with the world wears out the man of pleasure, it no less oppresses the man of business and ambition. The strongest spirits must at length sink under it. The happiest temper must be soured by incessant returns of the opposition, the
inconstancy

inconstancy, and treachery of men. For he who lives always in the bustle of the world, lives in a perpetual warfare. Here an enemy encounters; there, a rival supplants him. The ingratitude of a friend stings him this hour; and the pride of a superiour wounds him the next. In vain he flies for relief to trifling amusements. These may afford a temporary opiate to care; but they communicate no strength to the mind. On the contrary, they leave it more soft and defenceless, when molestations and injuries renew their attack.

Let him who wishes for an effectual cure to all the wounds which the world can inflict, retire from intercourse with men, to intercourse with God. When he enters into his closet, and shuts the door, let him shut out, at the same time, all intrusion of worldly care; and dwell among objects divine and immortal.——Those fair prospects of order and peace shall there open to his view, which form the most perfect contrast to the confusion and misery of of this earth. The celestial inhabitants quarrel not; among them there is neither ingratitude, nor envy, nor tumult. Men may harass one another; but in the kingdom of God, concord and tranquillity reign for ever.—From such objects, there beams upon the mind of the pious man, a pure and enlivening light; there is diffused over his heart a holy calm. His agitated spirit re-assumes its firmness, and regains its peace. The world sinks in its importance; and the load of mortality and misery loses almost all its weight. The *green pastures* open, and the *still waters* flow around him, besides which the *Shepherd of Israel* guides his flock. The disturbances and alarms, so formidable to those who are engaged in the tumults of the world, seem to him only like thunder rolling afar off; like the noise of distant waters, whose sound he hears, whose course he traces, but whose waves touch him not.—As religious retirement

retirement is thus evidently conducive to our happiness in this life, so

IN the second place, it is absolutely necessary in order to prepare us for the life to come. He who lives always in public, cannot live to his own soul. The world *lieth in wickedness*; and with good reason the Christian is exhorted, *not to be conformed to it, but transformed by the renewing of his mind*. Our conversation and intercourse with the world, is, in several respects, an education for vice. From our earliest youth, we are accustomed to hear riches and honours extolled as the chief possessions of man; and proposed to us, as the principal aim of our future pursuits. We are trained up, to look with admiration on the flattering marks of distinction which they bestow. In quest of those fancied blessings, we see the multitude around us eager and fervent. Principles of duty we may, perhaps, hear sometimes inculcated; but we seldom behold them brought into competition with worldly profit. The soft names, and plausible colours, under which deceit, sensuality, and revenge, are presented to us in common discourse weaken, by degrees, our natural sense of the distinction between good and evil. We often meet with crimes authorized by high examples, and rewarded with the carresses and smiles of the world. We discover, perhaps, at last, that those whom we are taught to reverence, and to regard as our patterns of conduct, act upon principles no purer than those of others.—Thus breathing habitually a contagious air, how certain is our ruin, unless we sometimes retreat from this pestilential region, and seek for proper correctives of the disorders which are contracted there? religious retirement both abates the disease, and furnishes the remedy. It lessens the corrupting influence of the world; and it gives opportunity for better principles to exert their power. He who is accustomed to turn aside, and commune with

with himself, will sometimes at least, hear of truths which the multitude do not tell him. A more sound instructor will lift his voice, and awaken within the heart those latent suggestions, which the world had overpowered and suppressed.

The acts of prayer and devotion, the exercises of faith and repentance, all the great and peculiar duties of the religion of Christ, necessarily suppose retirement from the world. This was one chief end of their institution, that they might be the means of occasionally sequestering us from that great scene of vice and folly, the continued presence of which is so hurtful. Solitude is the hallowed ground which religion hath, in every age, chosen for her own. There her inspiration is felt, and her secret mysteries elevate the soul. There, falls the tear of contrition; there rises towards heaven the sight of the heart; there, melts the soul with all the tenderness of devotion, and pours itself forth, before him who made, and him who redeemed it. How can any one, who is unacquainted with such employments of mind, be fit for heaven? If heaven be the habitation of pure affections, and of intellectual joy, can such a state be relished by him who is always immersed among sensible objects, and has never acquired any taste for the pleasures of the understanding, and the heart?

The great and the worthy, the pious and the virtuous, have ever been addicted to serious retirement. It is the characteristic of little and frivolous minds, to be wholly occupied with the vulgar objects of life. These fill up their desires, and supply all the entertainment which their coarse apprehensions can relish. But a more refined and enlarged mind leaves the world behind it, feels a call for higher pleasures, and seeks them in retreat. The man of public spirit has recourse to it, in order to form plans for general good; the man of genius, in order to dwell on his favourite themes, the philosopher, to pursue his discoveries;

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the saint, to improve himself in grace. *Isaac went out to meditate in the fields, at the evening tide. David, amidst all the splendour of royalty, often bears witness both to the pleasure which he received, and the benefit which he reaped, from devout meditation. I communed with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto God's testimonies. In the multitude of thoughts within me, his comforts delight my soul.* Our blessed Saviour himself, though of all who ever lived on earth he needed least the assistance of religious retreat, yet, by his frequent practice, has done it signal honour. Often were the garden, the mountain, and the silence of the night, sought by him, for intercourse with heaven. *When he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain, apart to pray.*

The advantages of religious retirement will still more clearly appear, by considering, as was proposed, in the next place, some of those great objects which should there employ our thoughts, I shall mention only three, which are of the most plain and acknowledged importance; God, the world, and our own character.

I. WHEN you retire from the world *commune with your hearts* concerning God. Impressions of Deity, besides their being the principle of what is strictly termed religion, are the great support of all moral sentiment, and virtuous conduct, among men. But with what difficulty are they preserved in any due degree of force, amidst the affairs and avocations of the world? While the crowd of surrounding objects is ever rushing on the imagination, and occupying the senses and the heart, what is not only absent from view, but, by its nature, invisible, is apt to vanish like a shadow. Hence it is given as the character of wicked men, in scripture, that they are *without God in the world.* They deny not, perhaps, that he does exist; but it is the same to them as though

though he did not : For having lost him from their view, his existence has not effected on their conduct. If, at any time, the idea of God rise in their mind, it rises like a terrifying phantom which they hasten to expel ; and which they gladly fancy to be unreal, because they see it make so little impression on others around them.

Let him who retire to serious meditation, begin with impressing deeply on his mind this important truth, That there is undoubtedly a Supreme Governour, who presides over the universe. But let him not imagine, that to commune with his heart concerning God, is to search into the mysteries of the Divine Nature, or to attempt a discovery of the whole plan of Providence. Long enough he may bewilder himself in this maze, without making any proficiency in the partial knowledge of God. Shall he who knows so little of his own nature, or of the nature of the objects with which he is surrounded, expect to comprehend the Being who made him ? To commune with ourselves, to any useful purpose, on this subject, is to bring home to our souls the internal, authoritative sense of God, as of a Sovereign and a Father. It is not to speculate about what is mysterious in his essence, but to contemplate what is displayed of his perfections. It is to realize the presence of the Supreme Being, so as to produce the most profound veneration ; and to awaken the earnest desire of as near an approach as our nature will permit, to that great Fountain of happiness and life.

After this manner was that holy man effected, who uttered his ardent wish. *O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat !*— If with such a frame of mind you seek after God, be assured that he is not far from you ; and that, though you are not permitted as yet to *come to his seat*, you may, at least, reach the footstool of his throne, and touch the robe that covers him. In the midst of your

solitary amusements lift your eyes, and behold all nature full of God. Look up to the firmament, and admire his glory. Look round on the earth, and observe his presence every where displayed. If the gay landscape or the fruitful field, present themselves to your eye, behold him smiling upon his works. If the mountain raise its lofty head, or the expanse of waters roll its tide before you, contemplate in those great and solemn objects, his power and majesty. Nature, in all its diversities, is a varied manifestation of the Deity. If you were to *take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea*, even there you would find him. For *in him you live and move*. He fills and animates all space. In the barren wilderness, as in the peopled region, you can trace his footsteps; and in the deepest solitude, you may hear a voice which testifies of him.

Him, indeed, you are never to confound with the workmanship of his hands. Nature, in its most awful or most pleasing scenes, exhibits no more than different forms of inanimate matter. But on these dead forms is impressed the glory of a living Spirit. The beauty, or the greatness, which appears in them, flows from the fountain of all greatness and beauty; in him it centers; of his perfection it reflects an image; and towards him should lead your view.—In conversing with a fellow-creature on earth, it is not with his body we converse, though it is his body only which we see. From his words and actions we conceive his mind; with his mind though invisible, we hold correspondence, and direct towards this Spiritual Essence, our affection and regard. In like manner, though here we behold no more of God than what his works display, yet, in those displays, we are capable of perceiving the Universal Spirit, and of holding correspondence with this unseen Being, in veneration, gratitude, and love.

It is thus that a pious man, in his retired meditations,

tions, viewing natural objects with a spiritual eye, communes with his heart concerning God. He walks among the various scenes of Nature, as within the precincts of a great temple, in the habitual exercise of devotion. To those discoveries of the Supreme Being in his works, let him apply the comment of his word. From the world of Nature, let him follow God into the world of Grace. When conducted from the outward courts, into this inmost sanctuary of the temple, he shall feel himself brought still more nigh to the Sacred Presence. In the great plan of Divine Wisdom, for extirpating the evils produced by sin, he shall receive the interpretation of many of the hidden mysteries of Nature. He shall discover in Christ, the Deity made, in some degree, visible to sense. In the beneficent works which he performed, and the gracious undertaking which he accomplished, he shall behold the *brightness of the Father's glory*, and shall discern it to be *full of grace and truth*.—From the sacred retreat, wherein his thoughts have been thus employed, he returns to the world like a superiour being. He carries into active life, those pure and elevating sentiments, to which the giddy crowd are strangers. A certain odour of sanctity remains upon his mind, which for a while at least, will repel the contagion of the world.

II. COMMUNE with your heart, in the season of retirement, concerning the world. The world is the great deceiver, whose fallacious arts it highly imports us to detect. But in the midst of its pleasures and pursuits, the detection is impossible. We trade as within an enchanted circle, where nothing appears as it truly is. It is only in retreat, that the charm can be broken. Did men employ that retreat, not in carrying on the delusion which the world has begun, not in forming plans of imaginary bliss, but in subjecting the happiness which the world affords to a strict discussion, the spell would dissolve; and in the room of the

unreal prospects, which had long amused them, the nakedness of the world would appear.

Prepare yourselves, then, to encounter the light of truth. Resolve rather to bear the disappointment of some flattering hopes, than to wander for ever in the paradise of fools. While others meditate in secret on the means of attaining worldly success, let it be your employment to scrutinize that success itself. Calculate fairly to what it amounts; and whether you are not losers on the whole, by your apparent gain. Look back, for this purpose on your past life. Trace it from your earliest youth; and put the question to yourselves, what have been its happiest periods? were they those of quiet and innocence, or those of ambition and intrigue? Has your real enjoyment uniformly kept pace with what the world calls prosperity? As you advanced in wealth or station, did you proportionally advance in happiness? Has success, almost in any one instance, fulfilled your expectations? Where you reckoned upon most enjoyment, have you not often found least? Wherever guilt entered into your pleasures, did not its sting long remain, after the gratification was past?—Such questions as these, candidly answered, would in a great measure unmask the world. They would expose the vanity of its pretensions; and convince you, that there are other springs than those which the world affords, to which you must apply for happiness.

While you commune with your heart concerning what the world now is, consider also what will one day appear to be. Anticipate the awful moment of your bidding it an eternal farewell. Think, what reflections shall most probably arise, when you are quitting the field, and looking back on the scene of action. In what light will your closing eyes contemplate those vanities which now shine so bright, and those interests which now swell into such high importance? What part will you then wish to have acted? What shall then

then appear momentous, what trifling in human conduct?—Let the sober sentiments which such anticipations suggest, temper now your misplaced ardour. Let the last conclusion which you shall form, enter into the present estimate, which you make of the world and of life.

Moreover, in communing with yourselves concerning the world, contemplate it as subject to the Divine dominion. The greater part of men behold nothing more than the rotation of human affairs. They see a great crowd ever in motion; the fortunes of men alternately rising and falling; virtue often distressed, and prosperity appearing to be the purchase of worldly wisdom. But this is only the outside of things. Behind the curtain, there is a far greater scene, which is beheld by none but the retired, religious spectator. Lift up that curtain, when you are alone with God. View the world with the eye of a Christian; and you shall see, that while *man's heart deviseth his way it is the Lord who directeth his steps*. You shall see, that however men appear to move and act after their own pleasure, they are, nevertheless, retained in secret bonds by the Almighty, and all their operations, rendered subservient to the ends of his moral government. You shall behold him obliging *the wrath of man to praise him*; punishing the sinner by means of his own iniquities; from the trials of the righteous, bringing forth their reward; and to a state of seeming universal confusion, preparing the wisest and most equitable issue. While the *fashion of this world* is passed fast away, you shall discern the glory of another rising to succeed it. You shall behold all human events, our griefs and our joys, our love and our hatred, our character and memory, absorbed in the ocean of eternity; and no trace of our present existence left, except its being for ever *well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked*.—Such a view of the world, frequently presented to our minds, could not

fail to enforce those solemn conclusions ; *There is no wisdom, nor counsel, against the Lord. Fear God, and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole of man. What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?*

III. COMMUNE with your hearts, concerning yourselves and your real character. To acquire a thorough knowledge of ourselves, is an attainment no less difficult than important. For men are generally unwilling to see their own imperfections ; and when they are willing to enquire into them, their self-love impose, on their judgment. Their intercourse with one another assists the delusion to which, of themselves, they are prone. For the ordinary commerce of the world is a commerce of flattery and falsehood ; where reciprocally they deceive, and are deceived ; where ever one appears under an assumed form, professes esteem which he does not feel, and bestows praise in order to receive it. It is only in retreat, where those false semblances disappear, and those flattering voices are silent, that a man can learn to *think soberly of himself, and as he ought to think.*

It has been said, that there are three characters which every man sustains ; and those often extremely different from one another ? One, which he possesses in his own opinion ; another, which he carries in the estimation of the world ; and a third, which he bears in the judgment of God. It is only the last which ascertains what he really is.—Whether the character which the world forms of you, be above or below the truth, it imports you not much to know. But it is of eternal consequence, that the character which you possess in your own eyes, be formed upon that which you bare in the sight of God. In order to try it by this great standard, you must lay aside, as much as possible, all partiality to yourselves ; and in the season of retirement, explore your heart with such accurate scrutiny, as may bring your hidden defects to light.

Enquire

Enquire for this purpose, whether you be not conscious, that the fair opinion which the world entertains of you, is founded on their partial knowledge both of your abilities and your virtues? Would you be willing that all your actions should be publicly canvassed? Could you bare to have your thoughts laid open? Are there no parts of your life which you would be uneasy if an enemy could discover? In what light, then, must these appear to God? When you have kept free of vice, has your innocence proceeded from purity of principle, or from wordly motives? Rises there no envy or malignity with you, when you compare your own condition with that of others? Have you been as solicitous to regulate your heart, as to preserve your manners from reproach? Professing yourselves to be Christians, has the Spirit of Christ appeared in your conduct? Declaring that you hope for immortality, has that hope surmounted undue attachments to the present life?

Such investigations as this, seriously pursued, might produce to every man many discoveries of himself; discoveries not pleasing, perhaps, to vanity, but salutary and useful. for he can be only a flatterer, but no true friend to himself, who aims not at knowing his own defects, as well as virtues. By imposing on the world, he may carry on some plan of fancied profit; but by imposing on his heart, what can he propose to gain? *He feedeth of ashes: A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand?*

THUS I have set before you, some of those great objects which ought, to employ your meditation in religious retirement. I have endeavoured to introduce you into a proper intercourse with your heart, concerning God, the world, and your own character. Let this intercourse terminate in fixing the principles of your future conduct. Let it serve to introduce consistency into your life. Nothing can be more waver-

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ing and disjointed, than the behaviour of those who are wholly men of the world, and have never been inured to commune with themselves. Dissipation is a more frequent cause of their ruin; than determined impiety. It is not so much because they have adopted bad principles, as because they have never attended to principles of any kind, that their lives are so full of incoherence and disorder.—You hover on the borders of sin and duty. One day you read the scriptures, you hear religious discourses, and form good resolutions. Next day, you plunge into the world, and forget the serious impression, as if it had been never made. The impression is again renewed, and again effaced; and in this circle your life revolves. Is such conduct worthy of creatures endowed with intelligent powers? Shall the close of life overtake you, before you have determined how to live? Shall the day never come, that is to find you steady in your views, decided in your plans, and engaged in a course of action which your mind approves?—If you wish that day ever to arrive, retirement and meditation must first bring you home to yourselves, from the dissipation in which you are now scattered; must teach you to fix such aims, and to lay down such rules of conduct, as are suitable to rational and immortal beings. Then will your character become uniform and respectable. Then you may hope, that your life will proceed in such a train as shall prepare you, when it is finished, for joining the society of more exalted spirits.

S E R M O N X.

A C T S X. 2.

Cornelius—A devout man—

THAT religion is essential to the welfare of man, can be proved by the most convincing arguments.

arguments. But these how demonstrative soever, are insufficient to support its authority over human conduct. For arguments may convince the understanding, when they cannot conquer the passions. Irresistible they seem in the calm hours of retreat; but, in the season of action they often vanish into smoke. There are other and more powerful springs, which influence the great movements of the human frame. In order to operate with success on the active powers, the heart must be gained. Sentiment and affection must be brought to the aid of reason. It is not enough that men believe religion to be a wise and rational rule of conduct, unless they relish it as agreeable, and find it to carry its own reward. Happy is the man, who, in the conflict of desire between God and the world, can oppose, not only argument to argument, but pleasure to pleasure; who, to the external allurements of sense, can oppose the internal joys of devotion; and to the uncertain promises of a flattering world, the certain experience of that *peace of God which passeth understanding, keeping his mind and heart.*—Such is the temper and spirit of a *devout man*. Such was the character of Cornelius, that good centurion, *whose prayers and alms are said to have come up in a memorial before God.* Of this character I intend, through Divine assistance, to discourse; and shall endeavour, I. To explain the nature of devotion; II. To justify, and recommend it; and, III. To rectify some mistakes concerning it.

I. DEVOTION is the lively exercise of those affections, which we owe to the Supreme Being. It comprehends several emotions of the heart, which all terminate on the same great object. The chief of them are, veneration, gratitude, desire, and resignation.

It implies, first, profound veneration of God. By veneration, I understand an affection compounded of awe and love; the affection which, of all others, it
best

best becomes creatures to bear towards their infinitely perfect Creator. Awe is the first sentiment that rises in the soul, at the view of his greatness. But, in the heart of a devout man, it is a solemn and elevating, not a dejecting emotion; for he glows, rather than trembles, in the Divine presence. It is not the superstitious dread of unknown power, but the homage yielded by the heart to him who is, at once, the greatest and the best of Beings. Omnipotence, viewed alone, would be a formidable object. But considered in conjunction with the moral perfections of the Divine nature, it serves to heighten devotion. Goodness affects the heart with double energy, when residing in One so exalted. The goodness which we adore in him, is not like that which is common among men, a weak, mutable, undiscerning fondness, ill qualified to be the ground of assured trust. It is the goodness of a perfect Governour, acting upon a regular extensive plan; a steady principle of benevolence, conducted by wisdom; which subject to no *variableness or shadow of turning*, free from all partiality and caprice, incapable of being either soothed by flattery, or ruffled by resentment, resembles, in its calm and equal lustre, the eternal serenity of the highest heavens. *Thy mercy, O Lord! is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, and thy judgments are a great depth.*

Such are the conceptions of the great God, which fill with veneration the heart of a devout man. His veneration is not confined to acts of immediate worship. It is the habitual temper of his soul. Not only when engaged in prayer or praise, but in the silence of retirement, and even amidst the occupations of the world, the Divine Being dwells upon his thoughts. No place and no object, appear to him void of God. On the works of nature, he views the impression of his hand; and in the actions of men, he traces the operation

operation of his Providence. Whatever he beholds on earth, that is beautiful or fair, that is great or good, he refers to God, as to the supreme origin of all the excellence which is scattered throughout his works. From those effects he rises to the first cause. From those streams, he ascends to the fountain whence they flow. By those rays, he is led to that eternal source of light in which they centre.

DEVOTION implies, secondly, sincere devotion to God, for all his benefits. This is a warmer emotion than simple veneration. Veneration looks up to the Deity, as he is in himself; Gratitude regards what he is towards us. When a devout man surveys this vast universe, where beauty and goodness are every where predominant; when he reflects on those numberless multitudes of creatures, who in their different stations, enjoy the blessings of existence; and when at the same time he looks up to an Universal Father, who hath thus filled creation with life and happiness, his heart glows within him. He adores that disinterested goodness, which prompted the Almighty to raise up so many orders of intelligent beings, not that he might receive, but that he might give and impart; that he might pour forth himself, and communicate to the spirits which he formed, some emanations of his felicity.

The goodness of this Supreme Benefactor he gratefully contemplates, as displayed in his own state. He reviews the events of his life; and in every comfort which has sweetened it, he discerns the Divine hand. Does he remember with affection the parents under whose care he grew up, and the companions with whom he passed his youthful life? Is he now happy, in his family rising around him; in the spouse who loves him, or in the children who give him comfort and joy? Into every tender remembrance of the past, and every pleasing enjoyment of the present, devotion enters; for in all those beloved objects, it recognizes

recognizes God. The communication of love from heart to heart, is an effusion, of his goodness. From his inspiration, descends all the friendship which ever glowed on earth; and therefore to him it justly return, in gratitude, and terminates on him.

But this life, with all its interests, is but a small part of human existence. A devout man looks forward to immortality, and discovers still higher subjects of gratitude. He views himself as a guilty creature, whom Divine benignity has received into grace; whose forfeited hopes it has restored; and to whom it has opened the most glorious prospects of future felicity. Such generosity shown to the fallen and miserable, is yet more affecting to the heart, than favours conferred on the innocent. He contemplates, with astonishment, the labours of the Son of God, in accomplishing redemption for men; and his soul overflows with thankfulness to him, *who loved us, and washeth us from our sins in his own blood* — *What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?* Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name; *who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving-kindness and with tender mercies.*

DEVOTION implies, thirdly, the desire of the soul after the favour of the Supreme Being, as its chief good, and final rest. To inferior enjoyments, the devout man allots inferior and secondary attachment. He disclaims not every earthly affection. He pretends not to renounce all pleasure in the comforts of his present state. Such an unnatural renunciation humanity forbids, and religion cannot require. But from these he expects not his supreme bliss. He discerns the vanity which belongs to them all; and beyond the circle of mutable objects which surround him, he aspires after some principle of more perfect felicity, which shall not be subject to change or decay.

cay. But where is this complete and permanent good to be found? Ambition pursues it in courts and palaces; and returns from the pursuit, loaded with sorrows. Pleasure seeks it among sensual joys; and retires with the confession of disappointment. *The deep saith, it is not in me; and the sea saith, it is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold; neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. Its place is not in the land of the living.* True happiness dwells with God; and from *the light of his countenance*, it beams upon the devout man. His voice is, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.* After exploring heaven and earth for happiness, they seem to him a mighty void, a wilderness of shadows, where all would be empty and unsubstantial without God. But in his favour and love, he finds what supplies every defect of temporal objects; and assures tranquillity to his heart, amidst all the changes of his existence. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel; and thou shalt receive me to thy glory. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

FROM these sentiments and affections, Devotion advances, fourthly, to an entire resignation of the soul to God. It is the consummation of trust and hope. It banishes anxious cares, and murmuring thoughts. It reconciles us to every appointment of Divine Providence; and resolves every wish into the desire of pleasing him, whom our hearts adore. Its genuine breathings are to this effect: "Conduct me, " O God! in what path soever seemeth good to thee. In nothing shall I ever arraign thy sacred will. Dost thou require me to part with any worldly advantages, for the sake of virtue and a good conscience? I give them up. Dost thou command me to relinquish my friends, or my country? At thy call I cheerfully leave them. " Dost

" Dost thou summon me away from this world? Lo!
 " I am ready to depart. Thou hast made, thou
 " hast redeemed me, and I am thine. Myself, and
 " all that belongs to me, I surrender to thy disposal.
 " Let the men of the world have *their portion in this*
 " *life.* Be it mine, to *behold thy face in righteous-*
 " *ness; and when I awake, to be satisfied with thy*
 " *likeness.*"

This, surely, is one of the noblest acts of which the human mind is capable, when thus, if we may be allowed the expression, it unites itself with God. Nor can any devotion be genuine, which inspires not sentiments of this nature. For devotion is not to be considered as a transient glow of affection, occasioned by some casual impressions of Divine goodness, which are suffered to remain unconnected with the conduct of life. It is a powerful principle, which penetrates the soul; which purifies the affections from debasing attachments; and by a fixed and steady regard to God, subdues every sinful passion, and forms the inclinations to piety and virtue.

SUCH in general are the dispositions that constitute devotion. It is the union of veneration, gratitude, desire, and resignation. It expresses, not so much the performance of any particular duty, as the spirit which must animate all religious duties. It stands opposed, not merely to downright vice; but to a heart which is cold, and insensible to sacred things; which, from compulsion perhaps, and a sense of interest, preserves some regard to the divine commands, but obeys them without ardour, love, or joy. I proceed.

If To recommend this devout spirit to your imitation. I begin with observing, That it is of the utmost consequence to guard against extremes of every kind in religion. We must beware, lest, by seeking to avoid one rock, we split upon another. It has been long the subject of remark, that superstition and enthusiasm are two capital sources of delusion; superstition

on the one hand, attaching men, with immoderate zeal, to the ritual and external part of religion; and enthusiasm on the other, directing their whole attention to internal emotions, and mystical communications with the spiritual world; while neither the one, nor the other, has paid sufficient regard to the great moral duties of the Christian life. But, running with intemperate eagerness from these two great abuses of religion, men have neglected to observe, that there are extremes opposite to each of them, into which they are in hazard of precipitating themselves. Thus the horror of superstition has sometimes reached so far, as to produce contempt for all external institutions; as if it were possible for religion to subsist in the world, without forms of worship, or public acknowledgment of God. It has also happened, that some, who in the main are well affected to the cause of goodness, observing that persons of a devout turn have at times been carried, by warm affections, into unjustifiable excess, have thence hastily concluded, that all devotion was a-kin to enthusiasm; and, separating religion totally from the heart and affections, have reduced it to a frigid observance of what they call the rules of virtue. This is the extreme which I purpose at present to combat, by showing you, first, That true devotion is rational, and well founded; next, That it is of the highest importance to every other part of religion and virtue; and, lastly, That it is most conducive to our happiness.

In the first place, True devotion is rational, and well founded. It takes its rise from affections which are essential to the human frame. We are formed by Nature, to admire what is great, and to love what is amiable. Even inanimate objects have power to excite those emotions. The magnificent prospect of the natural world, fill the mind with reverential awe. Its beautiful scenes create delight. When we survey the actions and behaviour of our fellow-creatures,
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the affections glow with greater ardour ; and, if, to unmoved, in the former case, argues the defect of sensibility in our powers, it discovers, in the latter, an odious hardness and depravity in the heart. The tenderness of an affectionate parent, the generosity of a forgiving enemy, the public spirit of a patriot or a hero, often fill the eyes with tears, and swell the breast with emotions too big for utterance. The object of those affections is frequently raised above us, in condition and rank. Let us suppose him raised also above us, in nature. Let us imagine, that an Angel, or any being of superiour order, had condescended to be our friend, our guide and patron ; no person, sure, would hold the exaltation of his benefactor's character, to be an argument why he should love and revere him less.—Strange ! that the attachment and veneration, the warmth and overflowing of heart, which excellence and goodness on every other occasion command, should begin to be accounted irrational, as soon as the Supreme Being becomes their object. For what reason must human sensibility be extinct towards him alone ? Are all benefits entitled to gratitude, except the highest and the best ? Shall goodness cease to be amiable, only because it is perfect ?

It will, perhaps, be said, that an unknown and invisible being, is not qualified, to raise affection in the human heart. Wrapt up in the mysterious obscurity of his nature, he escapes our search, and affords no determinate object to our love or desire. *We go forward, but he is not there ; and backward, but we cannot perceive, him ; on the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him : He hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him*—Notwithstanding this obscurity, is there any being in the universal more real and certain, than the Creator of the world and the supporter of all existence ? Is he, *in whom we live and move*, to distant from us too exalte devotion ?

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His form and essence, indeed, we cannot see; but to be unseen, and imperfectly known, in many other instances, precludes neither gratitude nor love. It is not the sight, so much as the strong conception, or deep impression, of an object, which affects the passions. We glow with admiration of personages, who have lived in a distant age. While nations have been transported with zeal and affection, for the generous hero, or public deliverer, whom they knew only by fame. Nay, properly speaking, the direct object of our love, is in every case invisible. For that on which affection is placed, is the mind, the soul, the internal character of our fellow-creatures; which surely, is no less concealed than the Divine Nature itself is, from the view of sense. From actions, we can only infer the dispositions of men; from what we see of their behaviour, we collect what is invisible; but the conjecture which we form, is, at best, imperfect; and when their actions excite our love, much of their heart remain still unknown. I ask then, in what respect God is less qualified than any other being, to be an object of affection? Convinced that he exists; beholding his goodness spread abroad in his works, exerted in the government of the world, displayed in some measure to sense, in the actions of his Son Jesus Christ; are we not furnished with every essential requisite which the heart demands, in order to indulge the most warm, and at the same time the most rational emotions?

If these considerations justify the reasonableness of devotion, as expressed in veneration, love, and gratitude, the same train of thought will equally justify it when appearing in the forms of desire, delight, or resignation. The latter are indeed, the consequence of the former. For we cannot but desire some communication with what we love; and will naturally resign ourselves to one, on whom we have placed the full confidence of affection. The aspirations of a devout

vout man after the favour of God, are the effects of that earnest wish for happiness, which glows in every breast. All men have somewhat that may be called the objects of their devotion; reputation, pleasure, learning, riches, or what ever apparent good has strongly attached their heart. This becomes the center of attraction, which draws them towards it; which quickens and regulates all their motions. While the men of the world are thus influenced by the objects which they severally worship, shall he only who directs his devotion towards the Supreme Being, be excluded from a place in the system of rational conduct? or be censured for having passions, whose sensibility corresponds to the great cause which moves them?—Having vindicated the reasonableness of devotion, I come,

IN the second place, to show its importance, and the high place which it possesses in the system of religion. I address myself now to those, who, though they reject not devotion as irrational, yet consider it as an unnecessary refinement; an attainment which may be safely left to recluse and sequestered persons, who aim at uncommon sanctity. The solid and material duties of a good life, they hold to be in a great measure independent of devout affection; and think them sufficiently supported, by their necessary connection with their interest, both in this and in a future world. They insist much upon religion being a calm, a sober, and rational principle of conduct.—I admit that it is very laudable to have a rational religion. But I must admonish you, that it is both reproachful and criminal, to have an insensible heart. If we reduce religion into so cool a state, as not admit love, affection, and desire, we shall leave it in possession of small influence over human life. Look abroad into the world, and observe how few act upon deliberate and rational views of their true interest. The bulk of mankind are impelled by their feelings. They are attracted

tracted by appearances of good. Taste and inclination rule their conduct. To direct their inclination and taste towards the highest objects; to form a relish within them, for virtuous and spiritual enjoyment; to introduce religion into the heart, is the province of devotion; and hence arises its importance to the interest of goodness.

Agreeably to this doctrine, the great Author of our religion, who well *knew what was in man*, laid the foundation of his whole system in the regeneration of the heart. The change which was to be accomplished on his followers, he did not purpose to effect, merely by regulating their external conduct; but by forming with them a new nature; by *taking away the heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh*; that is, a heart relenting and tender, yielding to the Divine impulse, and readily susceptible of devout impressions. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength: This is the first and great commandment.* *My son give me thy heart*, is the call of God to each of us; And, indeed, if the heart be withheld, it is not easy to convince what other offering we can present, that will be acceptable to him.

Of what nature must that man's religion be, who professes to worship God, and to believe in Christ; and yet raises his thoughts towards God, and his Saviour, without any warmth of gratitude or love? I speak not of those occasional decays of pious affection, to which the best are subject, but of a total insensibility to this part of religion. Surely, let the outward behaviour be ever so irreproachable, there must be some essential defect in a heart, which remains always unmoved at the view of infinite goodness. The affections cannot, in this case, be deemed to flow in their natural channel. Some concealed malignity must have tainted the inward frame. This is not the man whom you would chuse for your bo-

som-friend ; or whose heart you could expect to answer, with reciprocal warmth, to yours. His virtue, if it deserves that name, is not of the most amiable sort ; and may, with reason, receive the appellation (often injudiciously bestowed) of cold and dry morality. Such a person must, as yet, be *far from the kingdom of Heaven*.

As devotion is thus essential to religion in its principle, so it enters into the proper discharge of all its duties. It diffuses an auspicious influence over the whole of virtue. The prevailing temper of the mind is formed by its most frequent employments. Intercourse with Supreme perfection cannot, therefore, but ennoble and improve it. The pure love of God, naturally connects itself with the love of man. Hence, devotion has been often found a powerful instrument, in humanizing the manners of men, and taming their unruly passions. It smooths what is rough, and softens what is fierce, in our nature. It is the great purifier of the affections. It inspires contempt of the low gratifications belonging to animal life. It promotes an humble and cheerful contentment with our lot ; and subdues that eager desire of riches and of power, which has filled this unhappy world with crimes and misery. Finally, it bestows that enlargement of heart in the service of God, which is the great principle, both of perseverance, and of progress in virtue. He who, unacquainted with devout affections, sets himself to keep the Divine commandments, will advance in obedience with a slow and languid peace ; like one who, carrying a heavy burden, toils to mount the hill. But he whose heart devotion has warmed, will proceed on his way, cheerful and rejoicing. The one performs his duty, only because it is commanded ; the other, because he loves it. The one is inclined to do no more than necessity requires ; the other seeks to excel. The one looks for his reward in somewhat besides religion ; the other, finds

Ends it in religion itself : It is *his meat and drink to do the will of that heavenly Father*, whom he loves and adores. Which of these two are likely to make the greatest improvement in goodness, is easily discerned. Let us now consider,

IN the third place, the influence of devotion on the happiness of life. Whatever promotes and strengthens virtue, whatever calms and regulates the temper, is a source of happiness. Devotion, as I have just now shown, produces those effects in a remarkable degree. It inspires composure of spirit, mildness, and benignity ; weakens the painful, and cherishes the pleasing emotions ; and by these means, carries on the life of a pious man in a smooth and placid tenour.

Besides exerting this habitual influence on the mind, devotion opens a field of enjoyments, to which the vicious are entire strangers ; enjoyments the more valuable, as they peculiarly belong to retirement when the world leaves us, and to adversity when it becomes our foe. These are the two seasons, for which every wise man would most wish to provide some hidden store of comfort. For let him be placed in the most favourable situation which the human state admits, the world can neither always amuse him, nor always shield him from distress. There will be many hours of vacuity, and many of dejection in his life. If he be a stranger to God, and to devotion, how dreary will the gloom of solitude often prove ? With what oppressive weight will sickness, disappointment, or old age, fall upon his spirits ? But for those pensive periods, the pious man has a relief prepared. From the tiresome repetition of the common vanities of life, or from the painful corrosion of its cares and sorrows, devotion transports him into a new region ; and surrounds him there with such objects, as are the most fitted to cheer the dejection, to calm the tumults, and to heal the wounds of his heart. If the

world has been empty and delusive, it gladdens him with the prospect of a higher and better order of things, about to arise. If men have been ungrateful and base, it displays before him the faithfulness of that Supreme Being, who, though every other friend fail, will never forsake him. Consult your experience, and you will find, that the two greatest sources of inward joy, are the exercise of love directed towards a deserving object, and the exercise of hope terminating on some high and assured happiness. Both these are supplied by devotion; and therefore we have no reason to be surprised; if on some occasions, it fill the hearts of good men with a satisfaction not to be expressed.

The refined pleasures of a pious mind, are, in many respects, superiour to the coarse gratifications of sense. They are pleasures which belong to the highest powers, and best affections of the soul; whereas the gratifications of sense reside in the lowest region of our nature. To the one the soul stoops below its native dignity. The other, raise it above itself. The one, leave always a comfortable, often a mortifying, remembrance behind them. The other, are reviewed with applause and delight. The pleasures of sense resemble a foaming torrent, which, after a disorderly course, speedily runs out, and leaves an empty and offensive channel. But the pleasures of devotion resemble the equable current of a pure river, which enlivens the fields through which it passes, and diffuses verdure and fertility along its banks.—To thee, O Devotion! we owe the highest improvement of our nature, and much of the enjoyment of our life. Thou art the support of our virtue, and the rest of our souls, in this turbulent world. Thou composest the thoughts. Thou calmest the passions. Thou exaltest the heart. Thy communications, and thine only, are imparted to the low no less than to the high; to the poor, as well as to the rich.

rich. In thy presence, worldly distinctions cease; and under thy influence, wordly sorrows are forgotten. Thou art the balm of the wounded mind. Thy sanctuary is ever open to the miserable; inaccessible only to the unrighteous and impure. Thou beginnest on earth, the temper of heaven. In thee the hosts of angels and blessed spirits eternally rejoice. It now remains, that,

III. I ENDEAVOUR to correct some errors, into which men are apt to fall concerning devotion. For it is but too obvious that errors are often committed in this part of religion. These frequently disfigure its appearance before the world, and subject it to unjust reproach. Let us therefore attend deliberately to its nature, so as to distinguish pure and rational devotion, of which I have hitherto treated, from that which is, in any degree, spurious and adulterated.

In the first place, It is an error to place devotion in the mere performance of any external act of worship. Prayer and praise, together with the ordinances peculiar to the Christian religion, are the appointed means of raising the heart towards the Supreme Being. They are the instituted signs of devotion; the language in which it naturally expresses itself. But let us remember, that they are signs and expressions only; and we all know, that, in various cases, these may not correspond to the things signified. It is in the disposition of the heart, not in the motion of the lips, or in the posture of the body, that devotion consists. The heart may pray or praise, when no words are uttered. But if the heart be unconcerned or ill affected, all the words we can utter, how properly framed soever, are no other than empty and unacceptable sounds in the ear of the Almighty.

In the second place, It is an error to conceive the pleasures and advantages of devotion to be indiscriminately open to all. Devotion, like many parts of religion, may in some lights be considered as a privilege,

lege, and in others as a duty. It is the duty of all, to love God, and to resign themselves to his will. But it is the privilege of good men only, to rejoice in God, and to confide in his friendship. Hence a certain preparation is requisite, for the enjoyment of devotion in its whole extent. Not only must the life be reformed from gross enormities, but the heart must have undergone that change which the Gospel demands. A competent knowledge of God must be acquired. A proper foundation must be laid in faith and repentance, for intercourse with Heaven.

They who would rush all at once from the arms of the world, into the sacred retreat of devotion; they who imagine that retreat to stand always ready for the reception of such as betake themselves to it, for no reason, but because every other refuge excludes them, betray gross ignorance of this part of religion. They bring to it, faculties unqualified to taste its pleasures; and they grasp at hopes, to which they are not entitled. By incorporating with devotion the unnatural mixture of their unsanctified passions, they defile and corrupt it. Hence that gloom which has often spread over it. Hence, those superstitious mortifications and austerities, by which the falsely devout hope to purchase favour from God; haunted by the terrors of a guilty conscience, and vainly struggling to substitute a servile and cringing homage, in the room of the pure affections of a renewed heart. On such altars, the hallowed fire of true devotion cannot burn; nor can any incense ascend from them, that shall be grateful to Heaven. *Bring no more vain oblations. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, saith the Lord. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Then draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.*

— But though devotion requires a pure heart, and a virtuous life, and necessarily supposes the exercise of frequent retirement, I must observe,

In the third place, That it is an error to conceive it is requiring an entire retreat from the world. Devotion, like every other branch of religion, was intended to fit us for discharging the duties of life. We serve God, by being useful to one another. It is evident from the frame of our nature, and from our common necessities and wants, that we were designed by Providence for an active part on this earth. The Gospel of Christ, accordingly considers us as engaged in the concerns of the world; and directs its exhortations to men, in all the various relations, characters, and employments of civil life. Abstraction from society, therefore, and total dedication of our time to devout exercises, cannot be the most proper method of acquiring the favour of God.

I mean not however, to throw any blame on those, who having lost all relish for the ordinary pursuits of life, in consequence of severe wounds which they have received from affliction; who, being left to stand alone, and discerning their connections with the world to be in some measure broken off, choose to seek tranquillity in a religious retirement, and to consecrate their days entirely to God. Situations sometimes occur, which both justify a great degree of retreat from the world, and entitle it to respect. But with regard to the bulk of mankind, Christian devotion neither requires nor implies any such sequestration from the affairs of men. Nay, for the most part, it will be cultivated with greater success by those who mingle it with the active employments of life. For the mind, when entirely occupied by any one object, is in hazard of viewing it at last through a false medium. Objects, especially, so great and sublime as those of devotion, when we attempt to fix upon them unremitting attention, overstretch and disorder our feeble powers. The mind, by being relaxed, returns to them with more advantage. As none of your organs can bear intense sensations without injury; as the

eye, when dazzled with overpowering light, beholds imaginary colours, and loses the real distinction of objects; so the mind, when overheated by perpetual contemplation of celestial things, has been sometimes found to mistake the strong impressions of fancy, for supernatural communications from above. To the employments of devotion, as to all other things, there are due limits. There is a certain temperate sphere, within which it preserves longest its proper exertion, and most successfully promotes the purposes for which it was designed.

In the fourth place, It is an error to imagine, that devotion enjoins a total contempt of all the pleasures and amusements of human society. It checks, indeed, that spirit of dissipation which is too prevalent. It not only prohibits pleasures which are unlawful, but likewise that unlawful degree of attachment to pleasures in themselves innocent, which withdraws the attention of men from what is serious and important. But it brings amusement under due limitation, without extirpating it. It forbids it as the business; but permits it as the relaxation, of life. For there is nothing in the spirit of true religion, which is hostile to a cheerful enjoyment of our situation in the world.

They who look with a severe and indignant eye, upon all the recreations by which the cares of men are relieved, and the union of society is cemented, are, in two respects, injurious to religion. First, they exhibit to it others under a forbidding form, by clothing it with the garb of so much unnecessary austerity. And next, they deprive the world of the benefit which their example might afford, in drawing the line between innocent and dangerous pleasures. By a temperate participation of those which are innocent, they might successfully exert that authority, which a virtuous and respectable character always possesses, in restraining undue excess. They would show the young and unwary, at what point they ought to stop. They would have it in their power to regulate, in some degree

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the public manners; to check extravagance, to humble presumption, and put vice to the blush. But, through injudicious severity they fall short of the good they might perform. By an indiscriminate censure of all amusement, they detract from the weight of their reproof, when amusement becomes undoubtedly sinful. By totally withdrawing themselves from the circle of cheerful life, they deliver up the entertainments of society, into the hands of the loose, and the corrupted, and permit the blind power of fashion, uncontroled, to establish its own standards, and to exercise its dangerous way over the world.

In the fifth place, It is an error to believe that devotion nourishes a spirit of severity, in judging of the manners and characters of others. Under this reproach, indeed, it has so long suffered in the world; that, with too many, the appellation of devout, suggests no other character, but that of a sour and reclusive bigot, who delights in censure. But the reproach is unjust; for such a spirit is entirely opposite to the nature of true devotion. The very first traces which it imprints on the mind, are candour and humility. Its principles are liberal. Its genius is unassuming and mild. Severe only to itself, it makes every allowance for others which humanity can suggest. It claims no privilege of looking into their hearts, or of deciding with respect to their eternal state.—If your supposed devotion produce contrary effects; if it infuse harshness into your sentiments, and acrimony into your speech; you may conclude, that under a serious appearance, carnal passions lurk. And, if ever it shall so far lift you up with self-conceit, as to make you establish your own opinions as an infallible standard for the whole christian world, and lead you to consign to perdition, all who differ from you, either in some doctrinal tenets, or in the mode of expressing them; you may rest assured, that too much pride you have joined much ignorance, both of the nature of devotion, and of the Gospel of Christ. Finally, In

IN the sixth place, It is an error to think, that perpetual rapture and spiritual joy belong to devotion. Devout feelings admit very different degrees of warmth and exaltation. Some persons, by the frame of their minds, are much more susceptible than others, of the tender emotions. They more readily relent at the view of Divine goodness, glow with a warmer ardour of love, and, by consequence rise to a higher elevation of joy and hope. But, in the midst of still and calm affections, devotion often dwells; and, though it produce no transports in the mind, diffuses over it a steady serenity. Devout sensations not only vary in their degree according to the frame of different tempers; but, even among the best disposed, suffer much interruption and decay. It were too much to expect, that in the present state of human frailty, those happy feelings should be uniform and constant. Oppression of worldly cares, languor of spirits, and infirmities of health, frequently indispose us for the enjoyment of devout affections. Pious men, on those occasions, are in hazard of passing judgment on their own state with too much severity; as if, for some great iniquity, they were condemned by God to final hardness of heart. Hence arises that melancholy, which has been seen to overcloud them; and which has given occasion to many contemptuous scoffs of ungodly men. But it is a melancholy which deserves to be treated with tenderness, not with contempt. It is the excess of virtuous and pious sensibility. It is the overflowing of a heart affected, in an extreme degree, with the humble sense of its own failing, and with ardent concern to attain the favour of God. A weakness, however, we admit it to be, though not a crime; and hold it to be perfectly separable from the essence of devotion. For contrition, though it may melt, ought not to sink or overpower the heart of a Christian. The tear of repentance brings its own relief. Religion is a spring of consolation, not of terror, to every well-informed
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ed mind, which, in a proper manner, rests its hope on the infinite goodness of God, and the all-sufficient merit of Christ.

To conclude, Let us remove from devotion, all those mistakes, to which the corruptions of men, or their ignorance and prejudices, have given rise. With us let it be the worship of God, *in spirit and in truth*; the elevation of the soul towards him, in simplicity and love. Let us pursue it as the principle of virtuous conduct, and of inward peace. By frequent and serious meditation on the great objects of religion, let us lay ourselves open to its influence. By means of the institutions of the Gospel, let us cherish its impressions. And above all, let us pray to God, that he may establish its power in our heart. For here, if any where, his assistance is requisite. The spirit of devotion is his gift. From his inspiration it proceeds. Towards him it tends; and in his presence hereafter, it shall attain its full perfection.

S E R M O N XI.

TITUS. ii. 6.

Young men likewise exhort, to be sober-minded.

SOBRIETY of mind, is one of those virtues which the present condition of human life strongly inculcates. The uncertainty of its enjoyments, checks presumption; the multiplicity of its dangers, demands perpetual caution. Moderation, vigilance, and self-government, are duties incumbent on all; but especially on such as are beginning the journey of life. To them, therefore, the admonition in the Text is, with great propriety, directed; though there

is reason to fear, that by them it is in hazard of being least regarded. Experience enforces the admonition on the most giddy, after they have advanced in years. But the whole state of youthful views and passions, is adverse to sobriety of mind. The scenes which present themselves, at our entering upon the world, are commonly flattering. Whatever they be in themselves, the lively spirits of the young gild every opening prospect. The field of hope appears to stretch wide before them. Pleasure seems to put forth its blossoms on every side. Impelled by desire, forward they rush with inconsiderate ardour: Prompt to decide, and to choose; averse to hesitate, or to enquire; credulous, because untaught by experience; rash, because unacquainted with danger; headstrong, because unsubdued by disappointment. Hence arise the perils, of which it is my design at present to warn them. I shall take *sobriety of mind*, in its most comprehensive sense, as including the whole of that discipline which religion and virtue prescribe to youth. Though the words of the Text are directly addressed to *young men*, yet, as the same admonition is given in a preceding verse to the other sex, the instructions which arise from the Text are to be considered as common to both. I intend first, to show them the importance of beginning early to give serious attention to their conduct; and, next, to point out those virtues which they ought chiefly to cultivate.

As soon as you are capable of reflection, you must perceive that there is a right and a wrong, in human actions. You see, that those who are born with the same advantages of fortune, are not all equally prosperous in the course of life. While some of them, by wise and steady conduct, attain distinction in the world; and pass their days with comfort and honour; others of the same rank, by mean and vicious behaviour, forfeit the advantages of their birth, involve themselves in much misery, and end in being a disgrace

grace to their friends, and a burden to society. Early, then, you may learn, that it is not on the external condition in which you find yourselves placed, but on the part which you are to act, that your welfare or unhappiness, your honour or infamy, depend.—Now, when beginning to act that part, what can be of greater moment, than to regulate your plan of conduct with the most serious attention, before you have yet committed any fatal or irretrievable errors? If, instead of exerting reflection for this valuable purpose, you deliver yourselves up, at so critical a time, to sloth and pleasure; if you refuse to listen to any counsellor but humour, or to attend to any pursuit except that of amusement; if you allow yourselves to float loose and careless on the tide of life, ready to receive any direction which the current of fashion may chance to give you; what can you expect to follow from such beginnings? While so many around you are undergoing the sad consequences of a like indiscretion, for what reason shall not those consequences extend to you? Shall you only attain success without that preparation, and escape dangers without that precaution, which is required of others? Shall happiness grow up to you, of its own accord, and solicit your acceptance, when the rest of mankind, it is the fruit of long cultivation, and the acquisition of labour and care?—Deceive not yourselves with such arrogant hopes. Whatever be your rank, Providence will not for your sake, reverse its established order. The author of your being hath enjoined you to *take heed to your ways; to ponder the paths of your feet; to remember your Creator in the days of your youth.* He hath decreed, that they only *who seek after wisdom, shall find it; that souls shall be afflicted, because of their transgressions; and that whoso refuseth instruction, shall destroy his own soul.* By listening to these admonitions, and tempering the vivacity of youth with a proper mixture of serious thought, you may ensure

ensure cheerfulness for the rest of life; but by delivering yourselves up at present to giddiness and levity, you lay the foundation of lasting heaviness of heart.

When you look forward to these plans of life, which either your circumstances have suggested, or you friends have proposed, you will not hesitate to acknowledge, that in order to pursue them with advantage, some previous discipline is requisite. Be assured, that whatever is to be your profession, no education is more necessary to your success, than the acquirement of virtuous dispositions and habits. This is the universal preparation for every character, and every station in life. Bad as the world is, respect is always paid to virtue. In the usual course of human affairs, it will be found, that a plain understanding joined with acknowledged worth, contributes more to prosperity, than the brightest parts without probity or honour. Whether science, or business, or public life, by your aim, virtue still enters, for a principle share, into all those great departments of society. It is connected with eminence, in every liberal art; with reputation, in every branch of fair and useful business; with distinction, in every public station. The vigour which it gives the mind, and the weight which it adds to character; the generous sentiments which it breaths, the undaunted spirit which it inspires, the ardour of diligence which it quickens, the freedom which it procures from pernicious and dishonourable avocations, are the foundations of all that is high in fame, or great in success, among men.

Whatever ornamental or engaging endowments you now possess, virtue is a necessary requisite, in order to their shining with proper luster. Feeble are the attractions of the fairest form, if it be suspected that nothing within, corresponds to the pleasing appearances without. Short, are the triumphs of wit, when it is supposed to be the vehicle of malice. By
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whatever arts you may at first attract the attention, you can hold the esteem, and secure the hearts of others, only by amiable dispositions, and the accomplishments of the mind. These are the qualities whose influence will last, when the lustre of all that once sparkled and dazzled has passed away.

Let not then the season of youth be barren of improvements so essential to your future felicity and honour. Now is the seed-time of life; and according to *what you sow, you shall reap*. Your character is now, under Divine assistance, of your own forming; your fate is, in some measure, put into your own hands. Your nature is at yet plain and soft. Habits have not established their dominion. Prejudices have not pre-occupied your understanding. The world has not had time to contract and debase your affections. All your powers are more vigorous, disembarassed, and free, than they will be at any future period. Whatever impulse you now give to your desires and passions, the direction is likely to continue. It will form the channel in which your life is to run; nay, it may determine its everlasting issue. Consider then the employment of this important period, as the highest trust which shall ever be committed to you; as, in a great measure, decisive of your happiness, in time, and in eternity. As in the succession of the seasons, each, by the invariable laws of Nature, affects the productions of what is next in course; so, in human life, every period of our age, according as it is well or ill spent, influences the happiness of that which is to follow. Virtuous youth gradually brings forward accomplished and flourishing manhood; and such manhood passes of itself, without uneasiness, into respectable and tranquil old age. But when Nature is turned out of its regular course, disorders take place in the moral, just as in the vegetable world. If the Spring put forth no blossoms, in Summer there will be no beauty, and in Autumn no fruit. So, if youth

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be trifled away without improvement, manhood will be contemptible, and old age miserable. If the beginnings of life have been *vanity*, its latter end can be no other than *vexation of spirit*.

Having thus shown the importance of beginning early to give serious attention to conduct, I come, next, to point out the virtues which are most necessary to be cultivated in youth. What I shall,

I. RECOMMEND, is piety to God. With this I begin, both as the foundation of good morals, and as a disposition particularly graceful and becoming in youth. To be void of it, argues a cold heart, destitute of some of the best affections which belong to that age. Youth is the season of warm and generous emotions. The heart should then, spontaneously, rise to the admiration of what is great, glow with the love of what is fair and excellent, and melt at the discovery of tenderness and goodness. Where can any object be found, so proper to kindle those affections, as the Father of the universe, and the Author of all felicity? Unmoved by veneration? can you contemplate that grandeur and majesty, which his works every where display? Untouched by gratitude, can you view that profusion of good, which, in this pleasing season of life, his beneficent hand pours around you? Happy in the love and affections of those with whom you are connected look up to the Supreme Being, as the inspirer of all the friendship which has ever been shown you by others; himself, your best and your first friend; formerly, the supporter of your infancy, and the guide of your childhood; now the guardian of your youth, and the hope of your coming years. View religious homage, as a natural expression of gratitude to him for all his goodness. Consider it as the service of the *God of your fathers*; of him, to whom your parents devoted you, of him, whom in former ages your ancestors honoured; and by whom they are now rewarded, and blessed

sed in heaven. Connected with so many tender sensibilities of soul, let religion be with you, not the cold and barren offsprings of speculation, but the warm and vigorous dictates of the heart.

But though piety chiefly belong to the heart, yet the aid of the understanding is requisite, to give a proper direction to the devout affections. You must endeavour, therefore, to acquire just views, both of the great principles of natural religion, and of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. For this end, study the secret scriptures. Consult the word of God, more than the systems of men, if you would know the truth in its native purity. When, upon rational and sober enquiry, you have established your principles, suffer them not to be shaken, by the scoffs of the licentious, or the cavils of the sceptical. Remember that in the examination of every great and comprehensive plan, such as that of Christianity, difficulties may be expected to occur; and that reasonable evidence is not to be rejected, because the nature of our present state allows us only to *know in part, and to see through a glass darkly*.

Impress your minds with reverence for all that is sacred. Let no wantonness of youthful spirits, no compliance with the intemperate mirth of others, ever betray you into profane sallies. Besides the guilty which is thereby incurred, nothing gives a more odious appearance of petulance and presumption to youth, than the affectation of treating religion with levity. Instead of being an evidence of superiour understanding, it discovers a pert and shallow mind; which vain of the first smatterings of knowledge, presumes to make light of what the rest of mankind revere.

At the same time, you are not to imagine, that when exhorted to be religious, you are to call upon, to become more formal and solemn in your manners than others of the same years, or to erect your-

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selves into supercilious reprovers of those around you. The spirit of true religion breaths gentleness and affability. It gives a native unaffected ease to the behaviour. It is social, kind, and cheerful: far removed from that gloomy and illiberal superstition which clouds the brow, sharpens the temper, dejects the spirit, and teaches men to fit themselves for another world, by neglecting the concerns of this. Let your religion, on the contrary, connect preparation for heaven, with an honourable discharge of the duties of active life. Let it be associated in your imagination, with all that is manly and useful; *with whatsoever things are true, are just, are pure, are lovely, are of good report, wherever there is any virtue, and wherever there is any praise.* Of such religion discover, on every proper occasion, that you are not ashamed; but avoid making any unnecessary ostentation of it before the world.

II. To piety, join modesty and docility, reverence of your parents, and submission to those who are your superiours in knowledge, in station, and in years. Dependence and obedience belong to youth. Modesty is one of its chief ornaments; and has ever been esteemed a presage of rising merit. When entering on the career of life, it is your part, not to assume the reins as yet into your hands; but to commit yourselves to the guidance of the more experienced, and to become wise by the wisdom of those who have gone before you.

Of all the follies incident to youth, there are none which either deform its present appearance, or blast the prospect of its future prosperity, more than self-conceit, presumption, and obstinacy. By checking its natural progress in improvement, they fix it on long immaturity; and frequently produce mischief, which can never be repaired. Yet these are vices too commonly found among the young. Big with enterprise, and elated by hope, they resolve to trust

trust for success to none but themselves. Full of their own abilities, they deride the admonitions which are given them by their friends, as the timorous suggestions of age. Too wise to learn, too impatient to deliberate, too forward to be restrained, they plunge with precipitant indiscretion, into the midst of all the dangers with which life abounds. *Seest thou a young man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him.*—Positive as you now are in your opinions, and confident in your assertions, be assured, that the time approaches, when both men and things will appear to you in a different light. Many characters which you now admire, will, by and by, sink in your esteem; and many opinions, of which you are at present most tenacious, will alter as you advance in years. Distrust, therefore, that glare of youthful presumption, which dazzles your eyes. Abound not in your own sense. Put not yourselves forward with too much eagerness; nor imagine, that by the impetuosity of juvenile ardour, you can overturn systems which have been long established, and change the face of the world. *Learn not to think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think, but to think soberly.* By patient and gradual progression in improvement, you may in due time, command lasting esteem. But by assuming at present, a tone of superiority, to which you have no title, you will disgust those whose approbation it is most important to gain. Forward vivacity may fit you to be the companions of an idle hour. More solid qualities must recommend you to the wise, and mark you out for importance and consideration in subsequent life.

III. It is necessary to recommend to you, sincerity and truth. This is the basis of every virtue. That darkness of character, where we can see no heart; those foldings of art, through which no native affection is allowed to penetrate, present an object, unamiable

miable in every season of life, but particularly odious in youth. If, at an age when the heart is warm, when the emotions are strong, and when nature is expected to shew itself free and open, you can already smile and deceive, what are we to look for, when you shall be longer hackneyed in the ways of men; when interest shall have completed the obduration of your heart, and experience shall have improved you in all the arts of guile? Dissimulation in youth, is the fore-runner of perfidy in old age. Its first appearance, is the fatal omen of growing depravity, and future shame. It degrades parts and learning; obscures the lustre of every accomplishment; and sinks you into contempt with God, and man.

As you value therefore, the approbation of Heaven, or the esteem of the world, cultivate the love of truth. In all your proceedings, be direct and consistent. Ingenuity and candour possess the most powerful charm; they bespeak universal favour, and carry an apology for almost every failing. *The lip of truth, shall be established for ever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*—The path of truth, is a plain and safe path; that of falsehood, is a perplexing maze. After the first departure from sincerity, it is not in your power to stop. One article unavoidably leads on to another; till as the intricacy of the labyrinth increases, you are left entangled in your own snare. Deceit discovers a little mind, which stops at temporary expedients, without rising to comprehensive views of conduct. It betrays at the same time a dastardly spirit. It is the resource of one, who wants courage to avow his designs, or to rest upon himself. Whereas openness of character displays that generous boldness, which ought to distinguish youth. To set out in the world with no other principle than a crafty attention to interest, betokens one who is destined for creeping through the inferior walks of life. But to give an early preference

ference to honour above gain, when they stand in competition; to dispise every advantage, which cannot be attained without dishonest arts; to brook no meanness, and to stoop to no dissimulation; are the indications of a great mind, the presages of future eminence and destination in life.

At the same time, this virtuous sincerity is perfectly consistent with the most prudent vigilance and caution. It is opposed to cunning, not to true wisdom. It is not the simplicity of a weak and improvident, but the candour of an enlarged and noble mind; of one who scorns deceit, because he accounts it both base and unprofitable; and who seeks no disguise, because he needs none to hide him. *Lord! who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall ascend into thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart,*

IV. YOUTH is the proper season of cultivating the benevolent and humane affections. As a great part of your happiness is to depend on the connections which you form with others, it is of high importance that you acquire, betimes, the temper and the manners which will render such connections comfortable. Let a sense of justice be the foundation of all your social qualities. — In your most early intercourse with the world, and even in your youthful amusements, let no unfeanness be found. Engrave on your mind that secret rule. *of doing in all things to others, according as you wish that they should do unto you.* For this end impress yourselves, with a deep sense of the original, and natural, equality of men. Whatever advantages of birth and fortune you possess, never display them with ostentatious superiority. Leave the subordinations of rank, to regulate the intercourse of more advanced years. At present, it becomes you to act among your companions, as man with man. Remember how unknown to you are the vicitudes
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of the world ; and how often they, on whom ignorant and contemptuous young men once looked down with scorn, have risen to be their superiours in future years.

Compassion is an emotion, of which you ought never to be ashamed. Graceful in youth is the tear of sympathy, and the heart that melts at the tale of wo. Let not ease and indulgence contract your affections, and wrap you up in selfish enjoyment. But go sometimes to the *house of mourning*, as well as to the *house of feasting*. Accustom yourselves to think of the distresses of human life ; of the solitary cottage, the dying parent, and the weeping orphan. *Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hands from thy poor brother ; but thou shalt surely give unto him in the day of his need : And thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him ; because that for this thing, the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works.*— Never sport with pain and distress, in any of your amusements ; nor treat even the meanest insect, with wanton cruelty.

In young minds, there is commonly a strong propensity to particular intimacies and friendships. Youth, indeed, is the season when friendships are sometimes formed, which not only continue through succeeding life, but which glow to the last, with a tenderness unknown to the connections begun in cooler years. The propensity therefore is not to be discouraged ; though at the same time it must be regulated with much circumspection and care. Too many of the pretended friendships of youth, are mere combinations in pleasure. They are often founded on capricious likings ; suddenly contracted, and as suddenly dissolved. Sometimes they are the effect of interested complaisance and flattery on the one side, and of credulous fondness on the other. Beware of such rash and dangerous connections, which may afterwards load you with dishonour. Remember that by the character of those whom you
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choose for your friends, your own is likely to be formed, and will certainly be judged of by the world. Be slow, therefore, and cautious in contracting intimacy; but when a virtuous friendship is once established, consider it as a sacred engagement. Expose not yourselves to the reproach of lightness and inconstancy, which always bespeak, either a trifling, or a base mind. Reveal none of the secrets of your friend. Be faithful to his interests. Forsake him not in danger. Abhor the thought of acquiring any advantage by his prejudice or hurt. *There is a friend that loveth at all times, and a brother that is born for adversity. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.*

Finally, on this head; in order to render yourselves amiable in society, correct every appearance of harshness in behaviour. Let that courtesy distinguish your demeanour, which springs, not so much from studied politeness, as from a mild and gentle heart. Follow the customs of the world in matters indifferent; but stop when they become sinful. Let your manners be simple and natural; and of course they will be engaging. Affectation is certain deformity. By forming themselves on fantastic models, and vying with one another in every reigning folly, the young begin with being ridiculous, and end in being vicious and immoral.

V. LET me particularly exhort youth to temperance in pleasure: Let me admonish them, to beware of that rock on which thousands, from race to race, continue to split. The love of pleasure, natural to man in every period of his life, glows at this age with excessive ardour. Novelty adds fresh charms, as yet, to every gratification. The world appears to spread a continual feast; and health, vigour, and high spirits, invite them to partake of it without restraint. In vain we warn them of latent dangers. Religion is accused of insufferable severity, in prohibiting enjoyment; and the old, when they offer their admonitions,

ons, are upbraided with having forgot that they once were young. —And yet, my friends, to what do the restraints of religion, and the counsels of age, with respect to pleasure, amount? They may all be comprized in few words, not to hurt yourselves, and not to hurt others, by your pursuit of pleasure. Within these bounds, pleasure is lawful; beyond them it becomes criminal, because it is ruinous. Are these restraints any other, than what a wise man would choose to impose on himself? We call you not to renounce pleasure, but to enjoy it in safety. Instead of abridging it, we exhort you to pursue it on an extensive plan. We propose measures for securing its possession, and for prolonging its duration.

Consult your whole nature. Consider yourselves not only as sensitive, but as rational beings; not only as rational, but social; not only as social, but immortal. Whatever violates your nature in any of these respects, cannot afford true pleasure; any more than that which undermines an essential part of the vital system, can promote health. For the truth of this conclusion, we appeal, not merely to the authority of religion, nor to the testimony of the aged, but to yourselves and your own experience. We ask, Whether you have not found, that in a course of criminal excess, your pleasure was more then comperated by succeeding pain? Whether, if not from every particular instance, yet from every habit, at least, of unlawful gratification, there did not spring some thorn to wound you, there did not arise some consequence to make you repent of it in the issue? *How long then, ye simple ones! will ye love simplicity?* How long repeat the same round of pernicious folly, and tamely expose yourselves to be caught in the same snare? If you have any consideration, or any firmness left above temptations, for which you have found yourselves unequal, with as much care, as you would shun pestilential infection. Break off all connections with the loose and profligate.

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When sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Look not on the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup; for at the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Remove thy way from the strange woman and come not near the door of her house. Let not thine heart decline to her ways; for her house is the way to hell. Thou goest after her as a bird hasteth to the snare and knoweth not that it is for his life.

By these unhappy excesses of irregular pleasure in youth, how many amiable dispositions are corrupted or destroyed! How many rising capacities and powers are suppressed! How many flattering hopes of parents and friends, are totally extinguished! Who but must drop a tear over human nature, when he beholds that morning which arose so bright, overcast with such untimely darkness; that good hunter which once captivated all hearts, that vivacity which sparkled in every company, those abilities which were fitted for adorning the highest station, all sacrificed at the shrine of low sensuality; and one who was formed for running the fair career of life in the midst of public esteem, cut off by his vices at the beginning of his course, or sunk, for the whole of it, into insignificance and contempt!—These, O sinful Pleasure! are thy trophies. It is thus that, co-operating with the foe of God and man, thou degradest human honour, and blindest the opening prospect of human felicity.

VI. DILIGENCE, industry, and proper improvement of time, are material duties of the young. To no purpose are they endowed with the best abilities, if they want activity for exerting them. Unavailing, in this case, will be every direction that can be given them, either for their temporal or spiritual welfare. In youth, the habits of industry are most easily acquired. In youth the incentives to it are strongest, from ambition and from duty, from emulation and hope, from all the prospects which the beginning of

life affords. If, dead to these calls, you already languish in slothful inaction, what will be able to quicken the more sluggish current of advancing years?

Industry is not only the instrument of improvement, but the foundation of pleasure. Nothing is so opposite to the true enjoyment of life, as the relaxed and feeble state of an indolent mind. He who is a stranger to industry, may possess, but he cannot enjoy. For it is labour only which gives the relish to pleasure. It is the appointed vehicle of every good to man. It is the indispensable condition of our possessing a sound mind in a sound body. Sloth is so inconsistent with both, that it is hard to determine whether it be a greater foe to virtue, or to health and happiness. Inactive as it is in itself, its effects are fatally powerful. Though it appear a slowly flowing stream, yet it undermines all that is stable and flourishing. It not only saps the foundation of every virtue, but pours upon you a deluge of crimes and evils. It is like water which first purifies by stagnation; and then sends up noxious vapours, and fills the atmosphere with death.

Fly, therefore, from idleness as the certain parent both of guilt and of ruin. And under idleness I include, not mere inaction only, but all that circle of trifling occupations, in which too many saunter away their youth; perpetually engaged in frivolous society, or public amusements, in the labours of dress, or the ostentation of their persons.—Is this the foundation which you lay for future usefulness and esteem? By such accomplishments, do you hope to recommend yourselves to the thinking part of the world, and to answer the expectations of your friends and your country?—Amusements, youth requires. It were vain, it were cruel to prohibit them. But though allowable as the relaxation, they are most culpable as the business of the young. For they then become the
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gulf of time, and the poison of the mind. They foment bad passions. They weaken the manly powers. They sink the native vigour of youth, into contemptible effeminacy.

Redeeming your time from such dangerous waste, seek to fill it with employments which you may review with satisfaction. The acquisition of knowledge is one of the most honourable occupations of youth. The desire of it discovers a liberal mind, and is connected with many accomplishments, and many virtues. But though your train of life should not lead you to study, the course of education always furnishes proper employments to a well-disposed mind. Whatever you pursue, be emulous to excel. Generous ambition, and sensibility to praise, are, especially at your age, among the marks of virtue. Think not that any affluence of fortune, or any elevation of rank, exempts you from the duties of application and industry. Industry is the law of our being; it is the demand of Nature, of Reason, and of God. Remember always, that the years which now pass over your heads, leave permanent memorials behind them. From your thoughtless minds they may escape; but they remain in the remembrance of God. They form an important part of the register of your life. They will hereafter bear testimony either for or against you, at that day, when, for all your actions, but particularly for the employments of youth, you must give an account to God.

Thus I have set before you, some of the chief qualifications which belongs to that *sober mind*, that virtuous and religious character, which the Apostle in my Text recommends to youth; piety, modesty, truth, benevolence, temperance, and industry. Whether your future course is destined to be long or short, after this manner it should commence; and, if it continue to be thus conducted, its conclusion, at what time soever it arrives, will not be inglorious or unhappy. For, *honourable age is not that which standeth in length*.

of time, or that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the gray hair to men, and an unspotted life is old age.

LET me finish the subject, will recalling your attention to that dependence on the blessing of Heaven, which, amidst all your endeavours after improvement, you ought continually to persevere. It is too common with the young, even when they resolve to tread the path of virtue and honour, to set up with presumptuous confidence in themselves. Trusting to their own abilities for carrying them successfully through life, they are careless of applying to God, or of deriving any assistance from what they are apt to reckon the gloomy discipline of religion. Alas! how little do they know the dangers which await them? Neither human wisdom, nor human virtue, unspotted by religion, are equal for the trying situations which often occur in life. By the shock and temptation, how frequently have the most virtuous intentions been overthrown? Under the pressure of disaster, how often has the greatest constancy sunk? *Every good and every perfect gift is from above. Wisdom and virtue, as well as riches and honour, come from God.* Destitute of his favour, you are in no better situation, with all your boasted abilities, than orphans left to wander in a trackless desert, without any guide to conduct them, or any shelter to cover them from the gathering storm. Correct, then, this ill-founded arrogance. Expect not, that your happiness can be independent of him who made youth. By faith and repentance, apply to the Redeemer of the world. By piety and prayer, seek the protection of the God of heaven. I conclude with the solemn words, in which a great Prince delivered his dying charge to his son, words which every young person ought to consider as addressed to himself, and to engrave deeply on his heart. *Thou Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers; and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind. For the Lord searcheth*

searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

S E R M O N XII.

PROV. XVI. 31.

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

TO fear God, and to keep his commandments, is the rule of our duty, in every period of life. But, as the light which guide our steps, varies with the progress of the day, so the rule of religious conduct is diversified in its application, by the different stages of our present existence. To every age, there belongs a distinct propriety of behaviour. There arises from it, a series of duties peculiar to itself.

Of those which are incumbent on youth, I have treated in the preceding discourse. As we advance from youth to middle age, a new field of action opens; and a different character is required. The flow of gay and impetuous spirits begins to subside. Life gradually assumes a greaver cast; the mind, a more sedate and thoughtful turn. The attention is now transferred from pleasure to interest; that is, to pleasure diffused over a wider extent, and measured by a larger scale. Formerly, the enjoyment of the present moment occupied the whole attention. Now, no action terminates ultimately in itself, but, refers to some more distant aim. Wealth and power, the instruments of lasting gratification, are now coveted more than any single pleasure. Prudence and fore-

fight lay their plans. Industry carries on its patient efforts. Activity pushes forward; address, winds around. Here, an enemy is to be overcome; there a rival to be displaced. Competitions warm; and the strife of the world thickens on every side, to guide men through this busy period, without loss of integrity; to guard them against the temptations which arise from mistaken, or interfering, interests; to call them from wordly pursuits, to serious thoughts of their spiritual concerns, is the great office of religion.

But as this includes, in a great measure, the whole compass of moral duty; as the general strain of religious exhortation is addressed to those who are in this season of life; a delineation of the virtues, properly belonging to middle age, may appear unnecessary, and would lead us into too wide a field. Let us therefore turn our view to a bounded prospect; and contemplate a period of life, the duties of which are circumscribed within narrower limits. Old age is a stage of the human course, which every one hopes to reach; and therefore the consideration of it, interests us all. Is it a period justly entitled to general respect. Even its failings ought to be touched with a gentle hand; and though the petulant, and the vain, may despise the *hoary head*, yet the wisest of men has asserted in the Text, that when *found in the way of righteousness, it is a crown of glory*. I shall, first, offer some counsels, concerning the errors which are most incident to the aged. Secondly, I shall suggest the peculiar duties they ought to practise; and, thirdly, point out the consolations they may enjoy.

I. As the follies and vices of youth, are chiefly derived from inexperience and presumption; so, almost all the errors of age, may be traced up to the feebleness and distress peculiar to that time of life. Though in every part of life, vexation occurs, yet, in former years, either business, or pleasure, served

to obliterate their impression, by supplying occupation to the mind. Old age begins its advances, with disqualifying men for relishing the one, and for taking an active part in the other. While it withdraws their accustomed supports, it imposes, at the same time, the additional burden of growing infirmities. In the former stages of their journey, hope continued to flatter them with many a fair and enticing prospect. But in proportion as old age increases, those pleasing illusions vanish. Life is contracted within a narrow and barren circle. Year after year, steals somewhat away from their store of comfort, deprives them of some of their antient friends, blunts some of their powers of sensation, or incapacitates them for some function of life.

Though, in the plan of Providence, it is wisely ordered, that before we are called away from the world, our attachment to it should be gradually loosened; though it be fit in itself, that as in the day of human life, there is a morning and a noon, so there should be an evening also, when the lengthening shadows shall admonish us of approaching night; yet we have no reason to be surprised, if they who are arrived at this dejecting season, feel and lament the change which they suffer. The complaints, therefore, of the aged, should meet with tenderness, rather than censure. The burden under which they labour, ought to be viewed with sympathy; by those who must bear it in their turn, and who perhaps, hereafter may complain of it as bitterly. At the same time, the old should consider, that all the seasons of life have their several trials allotted to them; and that to bear the infirmities of age with becoming patience, is as much their duty, as it is that of the young to resist the temptations of youthful pleasure. By calmly enduring, for the short time that remains, what Providence is pleased to inflict, they both express a resignation most acceptable to God and recom-

mend themselves to the esteem and assistance of all who are around them.

But though the querulous temper imputed to old age, is to be considered as a natural infirmity, rather than as a vice; the same apology cannot be made for that peevish disgust at the manners, and that malignant censure of the enjoyments, of the young which is sometimes found to accompany declining years. Nothing can be more unjust, than to take offence at others, on account of their partaking of pleasures, which it is past your time to enjoy. By indulging this fretful temper, you both aggravate the uneasiness of age, and you alienate those on whose affection much of your comfort depends. In order to make the two extremes of life unite in amicable society, it is greatly to be wished, that the young would look forward, and consider that they shall one day be old; and that the old would look back, and remember that they once were young, make proper allowances for the temper and the manners of youth.

But instead of this, it is too common to find the aged at declared enmity with the whole system of present customs and manners; perpetually complaining of the growing depravity of the world, and of the astonishing vices and follies of the rising generation. All things, according to them, are rushing fast into ruin. Decency and good order have become extinct, ever since the happy discipline, under which they spent their youth, has passed away.—Part, at least, of this displeasure, you may fairly impute to the infirmity of age, which throws its own gloom on every surrounding object. Similar lamentations were in the days of your youth, poured forth by your fathers; and they who are now young, shall, when it comes to their turn, inveigh, in the like strain, against those who succeed them. Great has been the corruption of the world in every age. Sufficient ground there is for the complaints made by serious observers, at all times

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of abounding iniquity and folly. But though particular modes of vice prevail in one age, more than in others, it does not follow, that on that age all iniquity is accumulated. It is the form, perhaps, more than the quantity of corruption, which makes the distinction. In the worst of times, God has assured us, that there shall be always a seed who shall serve him. Say, not thou, *What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this. Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself over-wise.* Former follies pass away, and are forgotten. Those which are present, strike observation, and sharpen censure. Had the depravation of the world continued to increase in proportion to those gloomy calculations, which, for so many centuries past, have estimated each race as worse than the preceding; by this time, not one ray of good sense, nor one spark of piety and virtue, must have remained unextinguished among mankind.

One of the vices of old age, which appears the most unaccountable, is that covetous attachment to worldly interest, with which it is often charged. But this too, can naturally be deduced from the sense of its feebleness and decay. In proportion as the vigour both of body and mind declines, timidity may be expected to increase. With an anxious and fearful eye, the aged look forward to the evils, which threaten them, and to the charges which may befall. Hence, they are sometimes apt to overvalue riches, as the instrument of their defence against these dangers, and as the most certain means of securing them against solitude and disrespect. But though their apprehension may justify a cautious frugality, they can by no means excuse a sordid avarice. It is no less absurd, than it is culpable, in the old, from the dread of uncertain futurity, to deny themselves the enjoyment of the present; and to increase in anxiety about their journey, in proportion as it draws nearer to its close. There are more effectual methods of commanding respect from the world, than

the mere possession of wealth. Let them be charitable, and do good. Let them mix beneficence to their friends, with a cheerful enjoyment of the comforts which beset their state. They will then receive the returns of real respect and love. Whereas, by their riches, they procure no more than pretended demonstrations of regard; while their ill-judged parsimony occasions many secret wishes for their death.

As increasing years debilitate the body, so they weaken the force, and diminish the warmth of the affections. Chilled by the hand of time, the heart loses that tender sensibility, with which it once entered into the concerns and sorrows of others. It is, in truth, a merciful appointment of Providence, that as they who see many days, must behold many a sad scene, the impressions of grief upon their heart should be blunted by being often repeated; and that, in proportion as their power of advancing the prosperity of others decrease, their participation of the misfortunes of others shall also lessen. However, as in every period of life, humanity and friendship contribute to happiness, it is both the duty and the interest of the aged, to cherish the remains of the kind affections; and, from the days of former years, to recall such impressions as may tend to soften their hearts. Let them not, from having suffered much in the course of their long pilgrimage, become callous to the sufferings of others. But, remembering that they still are men, let them study keep their hearts open to the sense of human woe. Practised in the ways of men, they are apt to be suspicious of design and fraud; for the knowledge, and the distrust of mankind, too often go together. Let not, however, that wary caution, which is the fruit of their experience, degenerate into craft. Experience ought all to have taught them, that amidst all the falsehood of men, integrity is the best defence; and that he who continueth to the end to *walk uprightly* shall continue to *walk surely*. Having thus offered
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some admonitions concerning the errors most incident to age, I proceed,

II. To point out the duties which peculiarly belong to it.

The first which I shall mention, is, a timely retreat from the world. In every part of life, we are in hazard of being too deeply immerled in its cares. But, during its vigorous periods, the impulse of active spirit, the necessary business of our station, and the allowable endeavours to advance our fortune by fair industry, render it difficult to observe due moderation. In old age, all the motives of eager pursuit diminish. The voice of nature then calls you to leave to others the bustle and content of the world; and gradually to disengage yourselves from a burthen which begins to exceed your strength. Having borne your share of the heat and labour of the day, let the evening of life be passed in the cool and quiet shade. It is only in the shade, that the virtues of old age can flourish. There its duties are discharged with the most success; and there, its comforts are enjoyed with greatest satisfaction.

By the retreat of old age, however, I do not mean a total cessation from every worldly employment. There is an error in this, as well as in the opposite extreme. Persons who have been long harassed with business and care, sometimes imagine, that when life declines, they cannot make their retirement from the world too complete. But where they expected a delicious enjoyment of leisure and ease, they have often found a melancholy solitude. Few are able, in any period of their days, to bear a total abstraction from the world. There remains a vacancy which they cannot fill up. Incapable of being always employed in the exercises of religion, and often little qualified for the entertainments of the understanding, they are in hazard of becoming a burden to themselves, and to all with whom they are connected. It is, therefore,

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the duty of the aged, not so much to withdraw entirely from worldly business, as to contract its circle; not so much to break off, as to loosen their communication with active life. Continuing that train of occupation to which they have been most accustomed, let them pursue it with less intenseness; relaxing their efforts, as their powers decline; retiring more and more, from public observation, to domestic scenes, and serious thoughts; till as the decays of life advance, the world shall of itself withdraw to a greater distance from their view; its objects shall gradually yield their place to others of more importance; and its tumults shall sound in their ears, only like a noise which is heard from afar.

If it be the duty of the old, to retreat betimes from the fatigue of worldly care, it is still more incumbent on them, to quit the pursuit of such pleasures as are unsuitable to their years. Cheerfulness, in old age, is graceful. It is the natural concomitant of virtue. But the cheerfulness of age is widely different from the levity of youth. Many things are allowable in that early period, which in maturer years, would deserve censure; but which, in old age, both become ridiculous and criminal. By awkwardly affecting to imitate the manners, and to mingle in the vanities of the young, as the aged depart from the dignity, so they forfeit the privileges of gray hairs. But if, by follies of this kind, they are degraded, they are exposed to much deeper blame, by descending to vicious pleasure, and continuing to hover round those sinful gratifications to which they were once addicted. Amusement and relaxation the aged require, and may enjoy. But let them consider well, that by every intemperate indulgence, they accelerate decay; instead of enlivening, they oppress, and precipitate, their declining state. Ease, safety, and respect, are the proper enjoyments of age. Within these bounds let it remain, and not vainly attempt to break through
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that barrier, by which nature has separated the pleasures of youth, from the comforts left to the concluding years of life.

A material part of the duty of the aged, consists in studying to be useful to the race who are to succeed them. Here opens to them an extensive field in which they may so employ themselves, as considerably to advance the interest of religion, and the happiness of mankind. To them it belongs, to impart to the young the fruit of their long experience; to instruct them in the proper conduct, and to warn them of the various dangers, of life; by wise counsel, to temper their precipitate ardour; and both by precept and example, to form them to piety and virtue.

It is not by rigorous discipline and unrelaxing austerities, that they can maintain an ascendant over youthful minds. The constraint which their presence will impose, and the aversion which their manners will create, if the one be constantly awful, and the other severe, tend to frustrate the effect of all their wisdom. They must assume the spirit of the companion, and the friend; and mix with the authority of the age, a proper degree of indulgence to the manners of the young. Instead of lessening the respect due to their years by such condescension, they take the surest method to increase it. Old age never appears with greater dignity than when tempered by mildness, and enlivened with good humour, it acts as the guide and the patron of youth. Religion displayed in such a character, strikes the beholders, as at once amiable and venerable. They revere its power, when they see it adding so much grace to the decays of nature, and shedding so pleasing a lustre over the evening of life. The young wish to tread the same steps, and to arrive at the close of their days with equal honour. They listen with attention to counsels, which are mingled with tenderness, and rendered respectable by gray hairs. For notwithstanding all its presumption, youth naturally

naturally bends before superiour knowledge and years. Aged wisdom, when joined with acknowledged virtue, exerts an authority over the human mind, greater even than that which arises from power and station. It can check the most forward, abash the most profligate, and strike with awe the most giddy and unthinking.

In the midst of their endeavours to be useful to others, let not the aged forget those religious employments, which their own state particularly requires. The first of these, is reflection on their past behaviour, with a view to discover the errors which they have committed; and, as far as remaining life allows, to apply themselves to repentance and amendment.—Long has the world bewildered you in its maze, and imposed upon you by its arts. The time is now come, when its great seducer should mislead you no more. From the calm station at which you are arrived, sequestered from the crowd of the deceiving and the deceived, review your conduct, with the eye of Christians and immortal beings. After all the tumult of life is over, what now remains to afford you solid satisfaction? Have you served God with fidelity, and discharged your part to your fellow-creatures with integrity and a good conscience? Can you look forward, without terror, to that day which is to dissolve your connection with this world, and to bring you into the presence of him who made you, in order to give account of your actions?—The retrospect of life is seldom wholly unattended, by uneasiness and shame. Though to the good and the bad, it presents a very different scene; yet, to all the men, it recalls much guilt incurred, and much time mispent. It too much resembles the view, which a traveller takes from some eminence, of a barren country, through which he has passed, where the heath and the desert from the chief prospect; diversified only by a few scattered spots of imperfect cultivation.

Turn then your thoughts to the proper methods of
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making your peace with God through Jesus Christ; and implore, from Divine grace, that *new heart*, and *right spirit*, which will fit you for a better world. Let devotion fill up many of those hours, which are now vacant from wordly business and care. Let your affections dwell among divine and immortal objects. In silent and thoughtful meditation, walk as on the shore of that vast ocean, upon which you are soon to embark. Summon up all the considerations, which should reconcile you to your departure from life; and which may prepare you from going through its last scene, with firmness and decency. Often let your thanksgivings ascend to God, for that watchful care with which he hath hitherto conducted you, through the long journey of life. Often let your prayers be heard, that in what remains of your pilgrimage, he may not forsake you; and that, when you enter into the *valley of the shadow of death*, he may there support you with *his staff*, and defend you with *his rod*.—Amidst such thoughts and cares, let old age find you employed; betaken yourself to a prudent and timely retreat disengaged, both from the oppressive load of business, and from the unseasonable pursuit of pleasure; applying yourselves to form a the succeeding race, by your counsels to virtue and wisdom; reviewing seriously your past life; by repentance and devotion, preparing yourselves for a better; and, with humble and manly composure, expecting that hour, which Nature cannot now long delay. It remains,

III. To suggest the consolations which belong to old age, when thus *found in the way of righteousness*.

I must introduce them with observing, That nothing is more reasonable in itself, than to submit patiently to those infirmities of Nature, which are brought on by the increase of years. You knew beforehand what you had to expect, when you num-
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bered the successive Summers and Winters which were passing over your heads. Old age did not attack you by surprise, nor was it forced upon you against your choice. Often, and earnestly, did you wish to *see long life, and many days*. When arrived at the desired period, have you any just cause to complain, on account of enduring what the constitution of our being imposes on all? Did you expect, that for your sake, Providence was to alter its established order? Throughout the whole vegetable, sensible and rational world, whatever makes progress towards maturity, as soon as it has passed that point, begins to verge towards decay. It is as natural for old age to be frail, as for the corn to bend under the ripened ear, or for the autumnal leaf to change its hue. To this law, all who went before you, have submitted; and all who shall come after you, must yield. After they have flourished for a season, they shall fade like you, when the period of decline arrives, and bow under the pressure of years.

During the whole progress of the human course, the principle materials of our comfort, or uneasiness, lie within ourselves. Every age will prove burdensome, to those who have no fund of happiness in their own breast. Preserve them, if you could, from all infirmity of frame; bestow upon them, if it were possible, perpetual youth; still they would be restless and miserable, through the influence of ill-governed passions. It is not surprising, that such persons are peevish, and querulous, when old. Unjustly they impute to their time of life, that misery with which their vices and follies embitter every age. Whereas to good men, no period of life is unsupportable, because they draw their chief happiness from sources, which are independent of age or time. Wisdom, piety, and virtue, grow not old with our bodies. They suffer no decay from length of days. To them only belongs unalterable and unfaiding youth.

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Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.—

You can now, it is true, no longer relish many of those pleasures which once amused you. Your sensations are less quick than formerly; your days more languishing. But if you have quitted the region of of pleasure, in return, you possess that of tranquillity and repose. If you are strangers to the vivacity of enjoyment, you are free, at the same time, from the pain of violence and often disappointed desire. Much fatigue, much vexation, as well as vanity, attend that turbulence of life, in which the younger part of mankind are engaged. Amidst those keen pursuits, and seeming pleasures, for which you envy them, often they feel their own misery, and look forward with a wishful eye to the season of calmness and retreat. For, on all sides of human life, the ballance of happiness is adjusted with more equality than at first appears; and if old age throws some new distresses into the scale, it lightens also the weight of others. Many passions which formerly disturbed your tranquillity, have now subsided. Many competitions, which long filled your days with disquiet and strife, are now at an end. Many afflictions, which once rent your heart with violent anguish, are now softened into a tender emotion, on the remembrance of past woe. In the beginnings of life, there was room for much apprehension concerning what might befall in its progress. Your security was never untroubled. Your hopes were interrupted by many anxieties and fears. Having finished the career of labour and danger, your anxiety ought of course to lessen. Ready to enter into the harbour, you can look back, as from a secure station, upon the perils you have escaped, upon the tempest by which you was tossed, and upon the multitudes

titudes who are still engaged in conflicting with the storm.

If you have acted your part with integrity and honour, you are justly entitled to respect, and you will generally receive it. For rarely, or never, is old age contemned, unless when, by vice or folly, it renders itself contemptible. Though length of time may have worn off superficial ornaments, yet, what old age loses in grace, it often gains in dignity. The veneration as was before observed, which gray hairs command, puts it in the power of the aged, to maintain a very important place in human society. They are so far from being insignificant in the world, that families long held together by their authority, and societies accustomed to be guided by their counsels, have frequently had cause to regret their loss, more than that of the most vigorous and young. To success of every kind, the head which directs, is no less essential than the hand which executes. Vain, nay often dangerous, were youthful enterprise, if not conducted by aged prudence. *I said, days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. Therefore, thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God.*

Though, in old age, the circle of your pleasures is more contracted than it has formerly been; yet, within its limits, many of those enjoyments remain, which are most grateful to human nature. Temperate mirth, is not extinguished by advanced years. The mild pleasures of domestic life, still cheer the heart. The entertainments of conversation, and social intercourse, continue unimpaired. The desire of knowledge, is not abated by the frailty of the body; and the leisure of old age, affords many opportunities for gratifying that desire. The sphere of your observation and reflection, is so much enlarged by long acquaintance with the world, as to supply within itself, a wide range of improving thought. To recall the

VARIOUS

various revolutions which have occurred since you began to act your part in life ; to compare the characters of past and present times ; to trace the hand of Providence, in all the incidents of your own lot ; to contemplate, with thoughtful eye, the successive new appearances which the world has assumed around you, in government, education, opinions, customs, and modes of living ; these are employments, no less entertaining, than instructive to the mind.

While you are engaged in such employments, you are perhaps surrounded with your families, who treat you with attention and respect ; you are honoured by your friends ; your character is established ; you are placed beyond the reach of clamour, and *the strife of tongues* ; and, free from distracting cares, you can attend calmly to your eternal interests. For such comforts as these, have you not cause most thankfully to acknowledge the goodness of Heaven ? Do they not afford you ground to pass the remainder of your days in resignation and peace ; disposing yourselves to rise in due time, like satisfied guests, from the banquet that has been set before you ; and to praise and bless, when you depart, the great Master of the feast ? *To a man that is good in his sight*, whether he be young or old, *God giveth wisdom, and knowledge, and joy*. For every season of life, the benignity of his providence hath prepared its own satisfactions, while his wisdom hath appointed its peculiar trials. No age is doomed to total infelicity ; provided that we attempt not to do violence to Nature, by seeking to extort from one age, the pleasure of another ; and to gather, in the Winter of life, those flowers which were destined to blossom, only in its Summer, or its Spring.

BUT perhaps it will be said, That I have considered old age, only in its first stages, and in its most favourable point of light ; before the faculties are as yet much impaired, and when disease or affliction has laid no additional load on the burthen of years. Let

us then view it, with all its aggravations of distress. Let us suppose it arrived at its utmost verge, worn out with infirmities, and bowed down by sickness and sorrow. Still there remains this consolation, that it is not long ere *the weary shall be at rest*. Having passed through so many of the toils of life, you may now, surely, when your pilgrimage touches on its close, bear, without extreme impatience; the hardships of its concluding stage. From the inestimable promises of the Gospel, and from the gracious presence of God, the afflictions of old age cannot seclude you. *Though your heart should begin to faint, and your flesh to fail, there is One, who can be the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever. Even to your old age, saith the Lord, I am He; and even to hoary hairs, will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me.*

There is undoubtedly a period when there ought to be a satiety of life, as there is of all other things; and when death should be viewed, as your merciful dismissal from a long warfare. *To come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in its season,* is the natural termination of the human course. Amidst multiplying infirmities, to prolong life beyond its usual bounds, and to draw your existence here to the last and foulest dregs, ought not to be the wish of any wise man. Is it desirable, to continue lingering on the borders of the grave, after every tie which connects you with life is broken; and to be left a solitary individual, in the midst of a new generation, whose faces you hardly know? The shades of your departed friends rise up before you, and warn you, that it is time to depart. Nature and providence summon you, to be gathered to your fathers. Reason admonishes you, that as your predecessors made way for you, it is just that you should yield your place to those, who have arisen to succeed you on this busy stage; who

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for a while, shall fill it with their actions and their sufferings, their virtues and their crimes; and then shall, in their turn, withdraw, and be joined to the forgotten multitudes of former ages.

Could death indeed be considered in no other view, than as the close of life, it would afford only a melancholy retreat. The total extinction of being, is a thought which human nature, in its most distressed circumstances, cannot bear without dejection. But, blessed be God! far other prospects revive the spirits of the aged, who have spent their life in piety and virtue. To them, death is not the extinction, but the renovation of the living principle; its removal from *the earthly house of this tabernacle, to the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* Having fought the good fight; having finished their course, and kept the faith; there is laid up for them the crown of righteousness. The Saviour of the world hath not only brought immortality to light, but placed it within the reach of their hope and trust. By making atonement for their guilt, he hath prepared their way *within the veil*; and secured to them, the possession of *an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in the heavens.*—Such are the hopes and prospects, which cheer the sorrows of old age, and surmount the fear of death. Faith and piety are the only adequate supports of human nature, in all its great emergencies. After they have guided us through the various trials of life, they uphold us, at last, amidst the ruins of this falling frame; and when *the silver cord is just ready to be loosed: and the golden bowl to be broken; when the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern;* they enable us to say, *O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory?*

SERMON

S E R M O N XIII.

G E N E S I S. xlii. 21, 22.

And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not bear; Therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spoke I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not bear? Therefore, behold also his blood is required.

THIS book of Genesis displays a more singular and interesting scene, than was ever presented to the world, by any other historical record. It carries us back to the beginning of time; and exhibits mankind, in their infant and rising state. It shows us human manners in their primitive simplicity, before the arts of refinement had polished the behaviour, or disguised the characters of men; when they give vent to their passions without dissimulation, and spoke their sentiments without reserve. Few great societies were, as yet, formed on the earth. Men lived in scattered tribes. The transactions of families made the chief materials of history; and they are related in this book, with that beautiful simplicity, which in the highest degree, both delights the imagination, and affects the heart.

Of all the Patriarchal histories, that of Joseph and his brethren is the most remarkable, for the characters of the actors, the instructive nature of the events, and the surprising revolutions of worldly fortune. As far as relates to the Text, and is necessary for explaining it, the story is to the following purpose.—Joseph, the youngest, except one, of the sons of Jacob, was distinguished by his father with such marks of peculiar affections

fection, as excited the envy of his brethren. Having related to them, in the openness of his heart, certain dreams which pretended his future advancement above them, their jealousy rose to such a height, that they unnaturally conspired his destruction. Seizing the opportunity of his being at a distance from home, they first threw him into a pit, and afterwards sold him for a slave; imposing on their father, by a false relation of his death. When they had thus gratified their resentment, they lost all remembrance of their crime. The family of Jacob was rich and powerful; and several years passed away, during which they lived in prosperity without being touched, as far as appears, with the least remorse for the cruel deed which they had committed.

Mean while Joseph was safely conducted, by the hand of Providence, through a variety of dangers, until, from the lowest condition, he rose at last to be chief favourite of the King of Egypt, the most powerful monarch at that time in the world. While he possessed this high dignity, a general famine distressed all the neighbouring countries. In Egypt alone, by means of his foresight, and prudent administration, plenty still reigned. Compelled to have recourse to that kingdom for supply of food, the brethren of Joseph, upon this occasion, appeared in his presence, and made their humble application to him, for liberty to purchase corn; little suspecting the Governour of the land, before whom *they bowed down their faces to the earth*, to be him, whom, long ago, they had sold as a slave to the Ishmaelites. But Joseph no sooner saw, than he knew his brethren; and, at this unexpected meeting, his heart melted within him. Paternal tenderness arose, in all his warmth; and totally effaced, from its generous breast, the impression of their ancient cruelty. Though, from that moment, he began to prepare from them a surprise of joy; yet he so far constrained himself, as to assume

assume an appearance of great severity, by this he intended, both to oblige them to bring into Egypt his youngest and most beloved brother, whose presence he instantly required; and also to awaken within them, a due sense of the crime which they had formerly perpetrated. Accordingly, his behaviour produced the designed effect. For, while they were in this situation, strangers in a foreign land, where they had fallen, as they conceived, into extreme distress; where they were thrown into prison by the Governor, and treated with rigour, for which they could assign no cause; the reflection mentioned in the Text arose in their minds. Conscience brought to remembrance, their former sins. It recalled, in particular their long forgotten cruelty to Joseph; and without hesitation, they interpreted their present distress, to be a judgment for this crime, inflicted by Heaven. *They said, one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not bear: Therefore is this distress come upon us.—Behold also his blood is required.*

From this instructive passage of history, the following observations naturally arise. I. That a sense of right and wrong in conduct, or of moral good and evil, belongs to human nature. II. That it produces an apprehension of merited punishment, when we have committed evil. III. That although this inward sentiment be stifled during the season of prosperity, yet, in adversity, it will revive. And, IV. That when it revives, it determines us to consider every distress which we suffer, from what cause soever it has arisen, as an actual infliction of punishment by Heaven. The consideration of these particulars, will lead us to a very serious view of the nature of man, and of the government of God.

I. THERE belongs to human nature, a sense of moral good and evil, or a faculty which distinguishes right

fight from wrong, in action and conduct. *They said one to another, We are verily guilty.*—In an age when the law was not yet given, when no external revelation of the divine will, subsisted, except what had been handed down among the Patriarchs, from one generation to another; the brethren of Joseph reasoned concerning their conduct, upon the same moral principles, and were affected by the same feelings, of which we are conscious at this day. Such sentiments are coeval with human nature; for they are the remains of a law, which was originally *written in our heart*. In the darkness regions of the earth, and among the rudest tribes of men, a distinction has ever been made, between just and unjust, between a duty and a crime. Throughout all the intercourse of human beings, these distinctions are supposed. They are the foundation of the mutual trust, which the transactions of life require; nay, the very entertainments of society constantly appeal to them. The Historian, who studies to magnify his hero, by representing him as just and generous; the Poet, who seeks to interest the world in his fictions, by engaging the heart in behalf of distressed virtue; are sufficient to confute the Sceptic, who denies any natural perception of a distinction in actions.

But though a sense of moral good and evil be deeply impressed on the heart of man, yet it is not of sufficient power, to regulate his life. In his present corrupted state, it is both too general to afford him full direction in conduct, and too feeble to withstand the opposition of contrary principles in his nature. It is often perverted, by ignorance and superstition; it is too easily overcome by passion and desire. Hence, the importance of that Divine revelation, which communicates both light and strength; which by the instructive discoveries it makes, and by the powerful assistance it supplies, it raises man to a station infinitely superiour to that which he possesses under the mere light of Nature.

It is of consequence, however, to remark, That

this revelation necessarily supposes an antecedent sense of right and wrong to take place in the human mind. It addresses itself to men, as possessed of such a faculty; and, it commands them in general terms, to pursue *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely or of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise*. it plainly appeals to the native dictates of their heart. Nay, unless men were endowed by Nature, with some sense of duty, or of moral obligation, they could reap no benefit from revelation; they would remain incapable of all religion whatever. For, in vain were a system of duty prescribed to them by the word of God; allegiance were in vain required towards their Creator, or love and gratitude enjoined towards their Redeemer; if, previously, there was no principle in their nature, which made them feel the obligations of duty, of allegiance, and of gratitude. They could have no ideas corresponding to such terms; nor any conviction, that, independently of fear or interest, they were bound to regard, either him who made, or him who redeemed them.—This, therefore, is to be held as a principle, fundamental to all religion. That there is in human nature, an approving or condemning sense of conduct; by means of which, *they who have not the law, are a law unto themselves*. They who, from a mistaken zeal for the honour of Divine revelation, either deny the existence, or vilify the authority, of natural religion, are not aware, that, by disallowing the sense of obligation, they undermine the foundation on which revelation builds its power of commanding heart.

The Text leads us to observe, That one of the cases in which the natural sense of good and evil operates most forcibly, is, when men have been guilty of injustice or inhumanity. *We saw the anguish of our father's soul when he besought us, and we would not hear*. An inward principle prompts us to do good to others;

but

but with much greater authority, it checks, and condemns us, when we have done them injuries. This part of the human constitution deserves to be remarked, as a signal proof of the wisdom of its Author, and of the gracious provision which he has made for the welfare of mankind. We are all committed, in some measure, to the care and assistance of one another. But our mutual influence reaches much farther with respect to the evils, than with respect to the enjoyments, of those around us. To advance their prosperity, is often beyond our ability; but to inflict injuries, is almost always within our power: And, at the same time, self-interest very frequently tempts us to commit them. With the utmost propriety, therefore we are so framed, that the influence of the moral principle should be most authoritative, in cases where its aid is most needed; that to promote the happiness of others, should appear to us as praise-worthy, indeed, and generous; but that, to abstain from injuring them, should be felt as matter of the strictest duty.—Amidst the distress which the Patriarchs suffered in Egypt, had only this suggestion occurred, “We saw our brother beginning to prosper, and we contributed not to his advancement,” their minds would have been more easily quieted. But, when their reflection was, *We saw his anguish when he besought us, and we would not hear*, then compunction turned upon them its sharpest edge. I proceed to observe,

II. THAT our natural sense of right and wrong, produces an apprehension of merited punishment when we have committed a crime. When it is employed in surveying the behaviour of others, it distinguishes some actions, as laudable and excellent; and disapproves of others, as evil and base. But when it is directed upon our own conduct, it assumes a higher office, and exercises the authority of a judge. It is then properly termed, Conscience; and the senti-

ments which it awakens, upon the perpetration of a crime, are stiled, Remorse. *Therefore, said the brethren of Joseph, is this distress come upon us; behold also his blood is required.* They acknowledged, not only that they had committed a wrong, but a wrong, for which they were justly doomed to suffer.

Did not conscience suggest this natural relation between guilt and punishment, the mere principle of approbation, or disapprobation, with respect to moral conduct, would prove of small efficacy. For disapprobation attends, in some degree, every conviction of impropriety or folly. When one has acted unsuitably to his interest, or has trespassed against the rules of prudence or decorum, he reflects upon his conduct with pain, and acknowledges that he deserves blame. But the difference between the sense of misconduct, and the sense of guilt, consists in this, That the latter penetrates much deeper into the heart. It makes the criminal feel, that he is not only blameable, but justly punishable, for the part which he has acted. With reference to this office of conscience, the inspired writers frequently speak of it, in terms borrowed from the awful solemnities of judicial procedure; as, *bearing witness for or against us; accusing or excusing, judging and condemning.* It will be found that in the language of most nations, terms of the same import are applied to the operations of conscience; expressing the sense, which all mankind have, of its passing sentence upon them, and pronouncing reward, or punishments to be due to their actions.

The sense of punishment merited, You are further to observe, can never be separated from the dread, that at some time or other, punishment shall be actually inflicted. This dread is not confined to the vengeance of man. For, let the sinner's evil deeds be ever so thoroughly concealed from the knowledge of the world, his inward alarms are not quieted by that consideration. Now punishment is the sanction of a law.

law. Every law supposes a rightful superiour: And therefore, when conscience threatens punishment to secret crimes, it manifestly recognizeth a supreme Governour, from whom nothing is hidden. The belief of our being accountable to him, is what the most hardened wickedness has never been able to eradicate. It is a belief which rises, not merely from reasoning, but from internal sentiment. Conscience is felt to act as the delegate of an invisible Ruler; both anticipating his sentence, and foreboding its execution.

Hence arise the terrors, which so often haunt guilt, and rise in proportion to its atrocity. In the history of all nations, the Tyrant and the Oppressor, the bloody and the flagitious, have been ever pointed out, as fearful, unquiet, and restless; subject to alarms and apprehensions of an unaccountable kind. And surely, to live under such disquietude, from the dread of merited punishment, is already to undergo one of the most severe punishments which human nature can suffer. When the world threatens us with any of its evils, we know the extent, and discern the limits of the danger. We see the quarter, on which we are exposed to its attack. We measure our own strength with that of our adversary; and can take precautions, either for making resistance, or for contriving escape. But when an awakened conscience places before the sinner, the just vengeance of the Almighty, the prospect is confounding, because the danger is boundless. It is a dark unknown which threatens him. The arm that is stretched over him, he can neither see nor resist. On every side, he dreads it; and on every object which surrounds him, he looks with terror, because he is conscious that every object can be employed against him as an instrument of wrath. No wonder that the lonesome solitude, or the midnight hour, should strike him with horror. His troubled mind beholds forms, which other men see not and hears voices, which sound only in the ear of guilt. A hand

appears to come forth, and to write upon the wall over against him; as it is of old, in the sight of an impious monarch. *He shall find no ease nor rest. For the Lord shall give him a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And his life shall hang in doubt before him; and he shall fear day and night, and have none assurance of his life. In the morning he shall say, Would to God it were even; and at even he shall say, Would to God it were morning, for the fear of his heart wherewith he shall fear, and for the sight which his eyes shall see. His life shall be grievous unto him.*—

Adversity! how blunt are all the arrows of thy quiver, in comparison with those of guilt!—But if such be the power of conscience, whence, it may be asked, comes it to pass, that its influence is not more general, either in restraining men from the commission of sin, or in leading them to a timely repentance? This brings me to observe,

III. THAT, during a course of prosperity the operations of conscience are often suspended; and that adversity is the season which restores them to their proper force. At the time when crimes are committed the mind is too much heated by passion, and engrossed by the object of its pursuit, to be capable of proper reflection. After this tumult of spirits has subsided, if a train of new passions be at hand to employ its activity, or a succession of pleasurable objects occur to engage its attention, it may for a while remain, though not entirely free from inward misgivings, yet unconscious of the degree of its guilt. Dissipated among the amusements of life, the sinner escapes, in some measure, from his own view. If he reflects upon himself at all, the continuance of prosperity seems to him a strong justification of his conduct. For it will be found, that in the hearts of all men, there is a natural propensity, to judge of the favour of the Supreme Being, from the course of external events. When they are borne with a smooth gale along the stream

stream of life, and behold every thing proceeding according to their wish, hardly can they be brought to believe, that Providence is their enemy. Basking in the sun-shine of prosperity, they suppose themselves to enjoy the smile of indulgent Heaven; and fondly conclude that they are on terms of friendship with all above, and with all below. Easy they find it, then, to spread over the grossest crimes, a covering, thin, indeed, and slight, yet sufficient to conceal them from a superficial view.

Of this we have a very remarkable instance in those brethren of Joseph, whose history we now consider: Not only from the silence of the inspired writer, we have ground to believe that their remorse was stifled, while their prosperity remained; but we are able to trace some of the pretences, by which, during that period, they quieted their minds. For when they were contriving the destruction of Joseph, we find Judah saying to his brethren, *What profit is it, if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites; and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, and our flesh: And his brethren were content.* Here you behold them justifying their crime, by a sort of pretended humanity; and making light of selling their brother for a slave, because they did not take away his life. How strangely are the opinions of men altered, by a change in their condition! How different is this sentiment of the Patriarchs, from that which they afterwards entertained of the same action, when as you see in the Text, the Remembrance of it wrung their hearts with anguish?

But men, in truth, differ as much from themselves, in prosperity, and in adversity, as if they were different creatures. In prosperity, every thing tends to flatter and deceive. In adversity the illusions of life vanish. Its avocations, and its pleasures, no longer afford the sinner that shelter he was wont to find from conscience. Formerly, he made apart of the crowd. He now feels himself a solitary individual,

left alone with God, and with his own mind. His spirits are not supported as before, by fallacious views of the favour of Heaven. The *candle of the Lord* shines not on his head, his pride is humbled; and his affections are softened for receiving every serious impression. In this situation, a man's *iniquity is sure to find him out*. Whatever has been notoriously criminal in his former conduct, rises as a spectre, and places itself before him. The increased sensibility of his mind, renders him alive to feelings which lately were faint; and wounds which had been ill healed, bleed afresh. When *men take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ, they say, What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* But when they are bolden in the cords of affliction, then he sheweth them their work, and their transgression, that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ears to discipline; and commandeth, that they return from iniquity.

Hence, we may perceive the great usefulness, and propriety, of that interchange of conditions, which takes place in human life. By prosperity, God gives scope to our passions, and makes trial of our dispositions. By adversity, he revives the serious principle within. Neither the one, nor the other, could be borne entire and unmixed. Men, always prosperous, would be giddy and insolent; always afflicted, would be sullen and despondent. Hopes and fears, joy and sorrow, are, therefore so blended in his life, as both to give room for worldly pursuits, and to recall, from time to time, the admonitions of conscience. Of the proportion in which they should be mixed for this purpose, we are very incompetent judges. From our ignorance of the degree of discipline, which the spiritual state of others requires, we often censure Providence unjustly for its severity towards them: And, from the vanity and rashness of our wishes, we complain, without reason, of its rigour, to ourselves. While we consult nothing but our ease, God attends to

to our spiritual improvement. When we seek what is pleasing, he sends what is useful. When, by drinking too deep of worldly prosperity, we draw in a secret poison, he mercifully infuses a medicine, at the time that he troubles and embitters the waters. It remains now to observe,

IV. THAT when conscience is thoroughly awakened, it determines the sinner, to consider every calamity which he suffers, as a positive infliction of punishment by Heaven. As it had before alarmed him with threatenings of Divine displeasure, it tells him, when he falls under distress, that the threatened day of account is come. Afflictions, on some occasions, rise directly out of our sins. Thus, diseases are brought on by intemperance; poverty springs from idleness; and disgrace, from presumption. In such cases, the punishment is so closely connected with the crime, that it is impossible to avoid discerning the relation which the one bears to the other. But the appointment of Providence, which we now consider, reaches farther than this. God has framed us so, that distresses, which have no perceivable connection with our former crimes, are, nevertheless, interpreted by conscience to be inflicted on their account. They force themselves upon our apprehension, under this view. They are made to carry, not only that degree of pain which properly belongs to themselves, but that additional torment also, which rises from the belief of their being the vengeance of the Almighty.

Let a man fall unexpectedly into some deep calamity. Let that calamity be brought upon him, either by means which the world calls fortuitous; or by a train of incidents, in which his own misconduct, or guilt, has apparently had no part; yet one of the first questions, which, in such a situation, he puts to himself, is, What have I done to deserve this? His reflection is, almost instinctively, drawn back upon his former life; and if, in the course of that retros-

spect, any flagrant guilty deed occur to smite his conscience, on this he cannot avoid resting with anxiety and terrour, and connecting it in his imagination with what he now suffers. He sees, or thinks that he sees, a Divine arm lifted up; and what, in other circumstances, he would have called a reverse of fortune, he now views as a judgment of Heaven.

When the brethren of Joseph, confined in the Egyptian prison, were bewailing the distress into which they had fallen, there was no circumstance which pointed out any relation between their present misfortune, and their former cruelty to their brother. A long course of years had intervened, during which they flourished in wealth and ease. They were now far from the scene of their crime; in a foreign land, where they believed themselves utterly unknown, and where they had done nothing to offend. But conscience formed a connection between events, which according to the ordinary apprehension of men, were entirely independent of each other. It made them recollect, that they, who once had been deaf to the supplications of a brother, were now left friendless and forlorn, imploring pity in vain from an unrelenting Governour; and that they who had first conspired to kill their brother, and afterwards sold him for a slave, were themselves deprived of liberty, and threatened with an ignominious death. How undeservedly soever these evils befell them on the part of men, they confessed them to be just on the part of Providence. They concluded the hour of retribution to be arrived; and, in the person of the Governour of Egypt, they beheld the Ruler of the world calling them to account for guilt. *Therefore is this distress come upon us. Behold also his blood is required*

Similar sentiments, on like occasions, will be found not uncommon among mankind. Pious men, there is no doubt, are at all times disposed to look up to God, and to acknowledge his hand in every event of life.

life. But what I now observe, is, That where no habitual acknowledgment of God takes place ; nay, where a daring contempt of his authority has prevailed, conscience, nevertheless, constrains men, in the day of their distress, to recognize God, under the most awful of all characters, The avenger of past guilt.

Herein the wisdom of God appears in such a light, as justly to claim our highest admiration. The ordinary course of his providence, is carried on by human means. He has settled a train of events, which proceed in a regular succession of causes and effects, without his appearing to interpose, or to act. But these on proper occasions, are made to affect the human mind, in the same manner as if he were beheld descending from his throne, to punish the sinner with his own hand. Were God to suspend the laws of Nature on occasion of every great crime that was committed on earth, and to govern the world by frequent interpositions of a miraculous kind, the whole order of human affairs would be unhinged ; no plans of action could be formed ; and no scope would be given for the probation and trial of men. On the other hand, were the operation of second causes allowed to conceal a Divine hand totally from view, all sense of superiour government would be lost ; the world would seem to be void of God ; the sinner would perceive nothing but chance and fortune, in the distresses which he suffered. Whereas by its being so ordered, that several incidents of life, shall carry the same force, and strike the mind with the same impression, as if they were supernatural interpositions, the fear of God is kept alive among men, and the order of human affairs is, at the same time, preserved unbroken. The sinner sees his distress to be the immediate effect of human violence or oppression ; and is obliged, at the same moment, to consider it as a Divine judgment. His conscience gives

to an ordinary misfortune, all the edge and the sting of a visitation from Heaven.

FROM the train of thought which the Text has suggested, several inferences naturally follow. But I shall confine myself to two, which claim your particular attention.

The first is, the clear evidence which the preceding observations afford, of a Divine government now exercised over mankind. This most important and awful of all truths, cannot be too often presented to our view or too strongly impressed on our mind. To the imperfect conviction of it, which obtains in the world, must be ascribed, in a great measure, the prevalence of sin. Did men firmly believe, that the Almighty Being, who formed them, is carrying on a system of administration which will not leave guilt unpunished, it is impossible that they could remain so inattentive, as we often behold them, to their moral conduct. But the bulk of mankind are giddy and thoughtless. Struck by the superficial appearances of pleasure, which accompany licentiousness, they enquire no farther; and deliver themselves up to their senses, and their passions. Whereas, were they to reflect, but for a moment, upon that view which has now been given of human nature, they might soon be satisfied, that the moral government of God, is no matter of doubtful discussion. It is a fact, no less obvious and incontestable, than the government exercised by those earthly rulers, whom we behold with the ensigns of their office before our eyes

To govern, is to require a certain course of action, or, to prescribe a law; and to enforce that law, by a suitable distribution of rewards and punishments. Now, God has not only invested conscience, as we have seen with authority to promulgate, but endowed it also with power to enforce, his law. By placing inward approbation and peace on the side of virtue,

tue, he gave it the sanction of reward. But this was not enough. Pain is a more powerful principle, than pleasure. To escape misery, is a stronger motive for action, than to obtain good. God, therefore, so framed human nature, that the painful sense of ill-desert should attend the commission of crimes; that this sense of ill-desert should necessarily produce the dread of punishment; and that this dread should so operate on the mind, in the time of distress, as to make the sinner conceive Providence to be engaged against him, and to be concerned in inflicting the punishment which he suffers. All these impressions he hath stamped upon the heart with his own hand. He hath made them constituent parts of our frame; on purpose, that by the union of so many strong and pungent sentiments, he might enforce repentance and reformation, and publish to the human race his detestation of sin. Were he to speak to us from the clouds, his voice could not be more decisive. What we discern to be interwoven with the texture of human nature and to pervade the whole course of human affairs, carries an evidence not to be resisted. We might with as much reason, doubt whether the sun was intended to enlighten the earth, or the rain, to fertilize it; as whether he, who thus framed the human mind, intended to announce righteousness to mankind, as his law.

THE second inference which I make from the foregoing discourse, respects the intimate connection, which those operations of conscience have, with the peculiar and distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel of Christ. They will be found to accord with them so remarkably, as to furnish an answer to some of those objections, which superficial reasoners are apt to raise against the Christian revelation. In particular, they coincide with that awful view which the Gospel gives us, of the future consequences of guilt. If the sinner is now constrained by conscience, to
view

view the Almighty as pursuing him with evil for long-forgotten crimes, how naturally must he conclude, that in a subsequent period of existence, the Divine administration will proceed upon the same plan, and complete what has been left imperfect here? If, during this life, which is only the time of trial, the displeasure of Providence at sin is displayed by tokens so manifest, what may be apprehended to follow, when justice, which at present only begins to be executed, shall be carried to its consummation? What conscience forbodes, revelation verifies; assuring us, that a day is appointed, when God will render to every man according to his works; to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality; eternal life: But unto them that are, contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without the law, shall also perish without the law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.

While the threatenings of conscience thus strengthen the evidence of the scripture doctrine concerning future punishments, they likewise pave the way for the belief of what is revealed concerning the method of our deliverance by Christ. They suggest to the sinner, some deep and dark malignity contained in guilt, which has drawn upon his head such high displeasure from Heaven. They call forth his most anxious efforts, to avert the effects of that displeasure, and to propitiate his offended judge. Some atonement, he is conscious, must be made; and the voice of nature has, in every age, loudly demanded suffering, as the proper atonement for guilt. Hence mankind have constantly fled for refuge to such substitutions, as they could devise to place in the room of the offender; and, as by general consent, victims have every

every where been slain, and expiatory sacrifices have been offered up on innumerable altars. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, and calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand of rivers of oil? Or, shall I give my first-born for my transgression; the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul?* These perplexities and agitations of a guilty conscience, may be termed preludes, in some measure, to the Gospel of Christ. They are the pointings of unenlightened Nature, towards that method of relief, which the grace of God has provided. Nature felt its inability to extricate itself from the consequences of guilt: The Gospel reveals the plan of Divine interposition and aid. Nature confessed some atonement to be necessary: The Gospel discovers, that the necessary atonement is made. The remedy is no sooner presented, than its suitableness to the disease appears; and the great mystery of redemption, though it reaches, in its full extent, beyond our comprehension, yet, as far as it is revealed, holds a visible congruity with the sentiments of Conscience, and of Nature.

Natural and revealed religion proceed from the same Author; and, of course, are analogous and consistent. They are parts of the same plan of Providence. They are connected measures of the same system of government. The serious belief of the one, is the best preparation for the reception of the other. Both concur in impressing our mind with a deep sense of one most important truth which is the result of this whole discourse, That as *we sow now, we must reap*; that under the government of God, no one shall be permitted, with impunity, to gratify his criminal passions, and to make light of the great duties of life,

S E R M O N XIV.

P S A L M ii. 11.

Rejoice with trembling.

JOY and Fear, are two great springs of human action. The mixed condition of this world, gives scope for both; and, according as the one or the other predominates, it influences the general tenour of our conduct. Each of them possesses a proper place in religion. To *serve the Lord with gladness*, is the exhortation of the Psalmist David.—To *serve him with reverence and godly fear*, is the admonition of the Apostle Paul.—But under the present imperfection of human nature, each of these principles may be carried to a dangerous extreme. When the whole of religion is placed in joy, it is in hazard of rising into unwarrantable rapture. When it rests altogether on fear, it degenerates into superstitious servility. The Text enjoins a due mixture of both; and inculcates this important maxim, That joy, tempered with fear, is the proper disposition of a good man. In discoursing of this subject, I shall endeavour to shew, first, That joy is essential to religion; and next, That, for various reasons, this joy ought to be mixed with fear; whence we shall be able to ascertain the nature of that steady and composed spirit, which is most suitable to our present condition, and most acceptable to God.

I. JOY is essential to religion, in two respects; as religion inspires joy, and as it requires it. In other words, To rejoice, is both the privilege, and the duty, of good men.

IN

IN the first place, Religion inspires joy. It affords just ground of gladness, to all who firmly believe its doctrines, and sincerely study to obey its laws: For it confers on them, the two most material requisites of joy; a favourable situation of things without, and a proper disposition of mind within, to relish that favourable situation.

When they examine their situation without, they behold themselves placed in a world, which is full of the influence of a gracious Providence; where beauty and good are every where predominant; where various comforts are bestowed; and where, if any be withheld, they have reason to believe, that they are withheld by parental wisdom. Among the crowd that encompass them, they may be at a loss to discern, who are their friends, and who their enemies. But it is sufficient to know that they are under the protection of an invisible Guardian, whose power can keep them from every evil. All the steps of his conduct, they may be unable to trace. Events may befall them, of which they can give no account. But as long as they are satisfied, that the system of Divine government is founded on mercy, no present occurrences are able to destroy their peace. *For he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for them, how shall he not with him freely give them all things?* If their nature is frail, Divine assistance is promised to strengthen it. If their virtue is imperfect, a dispensation is opened, which gives them the hope of pardon. If their external circumstances be in any respect unfavourable, it is because a higher interest is consulted. *All things, they are assured, shall work together for their good.* On their prosperity rests, the blessing; on their adversity, the sanctifying Spirit, of the Almighty. Old age may advance, and life decay; but beyond those boundaries of Nature, faith opens the prospect of their lasting felicity. Without anxiety, they pass through the different periods of their present existence because,

because they know it to be no more than an introduction to immortality.

As such a situation of things without, lays a solid foundation for joy; so the disposition which religion forms within, promotes the relish of it. It is indeed from within, that the chief sources of enjoyments or trouble rise. The minds of bad men are always disorderly; and hence their lives are so generally uneasy. In vain *they take the timbrel and the harp; and endeavour to rejoice at the sound of the organ.* Spleen and disgust pursue them, through all the haunts of amusement. Pride and ill humour torment them. Oppressed with discontent, their spirits flag; and their worn-out pleasures afford them entertainment no more. But religion subdues those malignant passions, which are the troublers of human repose; which either overcast the mind with the gloom of peevishness, or disquiet it by the violence of agitation. It infuses, in their room, those mild and gentle dispositions, whose natural effect is to smooth the tenour of the soul. Benevolence and candour, moderation and temperance, wherever they reign, produce cheerfulness and serenity. The consciousness of integrity, gives ease and freedom to the mind. It enables good men to extract from every object, the whole satisfaction which it is capable of yielding; and adds the flavour of innocence, to all their external pleasures.

In the second place, As religion naturally inspires joy; so what it inspires, it commands us to cherish. As a necessary proof of our sincerity, it requires cheerfulness in the performance of our duty; because, if this be wanting, our religion discovers itself not to be genuine in principle, and in practice it cannot be stable.

Religious obedience, destitute of joy, is not genuine in its principle. For, did either faith or hope, the love of God, or the love of goodness, rule the heart; they could not fail to produce satisfaction in piety and virtue.

virtue. All those causes of joy which I have mentioned should then operate ; and their native effect on the mind, would follow. The prospects which religion opens, would gladden, and the affections which it inspires, would soothe the heart. We serve, with pleasure, the benefactor whom we love. We rejoice in every study and pursuit, to which we are sincerely attached. If we serve not God with pleasure, it is because we know him not. If we rejoice not in virtue, it is because our affection is alienated from it, and our inclinations are depraved. We give too evident proof, that either we believe not the principles of religion, or that we feel not their power. Exclude joy from religion ; and you leave no other motives to it, except compulsion and interest. But are these suitable grounds, on which to rest the whole of our obedience to the Supreme Being ? *My son, give me thy heart*; is the call of God. Surely if there be no pleasure in fulfilling his commands, the heart is not given him ; and, in that case, *the multitude of sacrifices, and burnt offerings*, is brought to his altar in vain.

As religion, destitute of joy, is imperfect in its principle ; so in practice, it must be unstable. In vain you endeavour to fix any man to the regular performance of that in which he finds no pleasure. Bind him ever so fast by interest or fear, he will contrive some method of eluding the obligation. Ingenuity is never so fertile of evasions, as where pleasure is all on the one side, and mere precept on the other. He may study to save appearances. He may dissemble and constrain himself. But his heart revolts in secret, and the weight of inclination will, in the end, draw the practice after it. If perseverance is not to be expected, still less can zeal be looked for, from him, who in his religious duties, trembles with rejoicing. Every attempt towards virtue which he forms, will be feeble and awkward. He applies to it as a task ; he dreads

dreads the task-master ; but he will labour no more than necessity enjoins. To escape from punishment, is his sole aim. He bargains for immunity, by every duty which he performs ; and all beyond, he esteems superfluous toil.—Such religion as this, can neither purify the heart, nor prepare for heavenly bliss. It is the refuge of an abject mind. It may form the ritual of the monk, or prescribe the penance of the idolater ; but has no concern with the homage of him, who *worships the Father in spirit and in truth*. His character is, that *the joy of the Lord is his strength*.—It attaches his heart to religion. It inspires his zeal. It supports his constancy ; and accelerates his progress.

There is no man, but has some object to which he cleaves for enjoyment ; somewhat that flatters him with distant hope, or affords him present pleasure. Joy is the end towards which all rational beings tend. For the sake of it, they live ; it resembles the air they breathe, which is necessary for the motion of the heart, and all the vital functions. But as the breathing of infected air proves fatal to life ; in the same manner, joy drawn from a corrupted source, is destructive, both of virtue, and of true happiness. When you have no pleasure in goodness, you may with certainty conclude the reason to be, that your pleasure is all derived from an opposite quarter. You have exhausted your affection upon the world. You have drunk too much of its poisoned waters, to have any relish for a pure spring.

Estimate, therefore, the genuineness of your religious principles ; estimate the degree of your stability in religious practice, by the degree of your satisfaction in piety and virtue. Be assured, that where your treasure is, there will your delight be also. The worldly man rejoices in his possessions ; the voluptuous, in his pleasures ; the social, in his friends and companions. The truly good man rejoices in *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the*

Lord

Lord his God. He is happy when employed, in the regular discharge of the great duties of life. Spontaneous they flow from the affections of a pure heart. Not only from the keeping of the divine commandments he expects, but *in the keeping of them*, he enjoys a great reward.—Accordingly, in the sentiments of holy men recorded in scripture, we find this spirit every where prevalent. Their language was ; *Thy statutes have I taken as mine heritage for ever ; for they are the rejoicing of my heart. They are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. They are sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb. Whom have I in heaven but thee ? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.* They did not receive the spirit of bondage, but the spirit of adoption. *They were filled with peace and joy in believing. They rejoiced in hope of the glory of God.* As soon as the Æthiopian eunuch received from Philip the light of the Gospel, that light revived and cheered his heart. A new sun seemed to arise ; a new glory, to shine around him. Every object brightened ; *and he went on his way rejoicing.*—After the same manner should every good man proceed in his journey through life, with a serene and cheerful spirit. Consternation and dejection let him leave to the slaves of guilt, who have every thing to dread both from this world and the next. If he appear before others with a dispirited aspect, he dishonours religion ; and affords ground for suspicion, that he is either ignorant of its nature, or a stranger to its power.

Thus I have shown joy to be essential to religion. It is the spirit which it inspires, and which it requires in good men, but in our present state, the best principles may be carried to a dangerous excess ; and joy, like other things has its due limits. To serve God with unmixed delight, belongs to more advanced spirits in a happier world. In this region of imperfection, some infusions from a different cup, must of necessity tincture our joy. Let us then,

II TURN

II. TURN to the other side of the argument, and consider the reasons which render it proper, that when we rejoice, we should *rejoice with trembling*.

In the first place, because all the objects of religion, which affords ground for joy, tend to inspire, at the same time, reverence and fear. We serve a Benefactor, it is true, in whom we have reason to delight; whose purposes are gracious; whose law is the plan of our happiness. But this Benefactor, is the *King, eternal, immortal, and invisible*; at whose presence, the mountains shake, and Nature trembles. *Every good and every perfect gift, come down from him*. But thee hand which confers them we cannot see. Mysterious obscurity rests upon his essence. He dwelleth in the *secret place of thunder*; and clouds and darkness surround him. He is the *Hearer of prayer*; but we lift our voice to him from afar. Into his immediate presence no access is permitted. Our warmest devotion admits no familiarity with him. *God is in heaven, and thou upon earth*; therefore, let thy words be few. If his omniscience administers comfort in our secret distress, it likewise fills with awe the heart that is conscious of guilt. For, if he *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*; our iniquities, also, are ever before him; our secret sins, in the light of his countenance.

Throughout all his dispensations, greatness, in conjunction with goodness strikes our view; and, wherever we behold the Parent, we behold the Legislator also. The death of Christ, in behalf of a guilty world, is the chief ground of religious hope and joy. But it is no less the ground of reverence; when in this high transaction, we contemplate God, as at once strict in justice, and great in mercy. *I the Lord keep mercy for thousands of them that fear me I forgive their iniquity, transgression, and sin: but I will by no means clear the guilty*. When we open the book of the Law, we find promises and threatenings mingled in the same page. On the one side, we see Heaven displayed in
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all its glory : On the other, Hell opening its treasures. In short, in what ever light we view religion, it appears solemn and venerable. It is a temple full of majesty, to which the worshippers may approach with comfort, in the hope of *obtaining grace, and finding mercy* ; but where they cannot enter, without being impressed with awe. If we may be permitted to compare spiritual with natural things, religion resembles not those scenes of natural beauty, where every object smiles. It cannot be likened to the gay landscape, or the flowery field. It resembles more the august and sublime appearances of Nature ; the lofty mountain, the expanded ocean, and the starry firmament ; at the sight of which, the mind is at once overawed and delighted ; and, from the union of grandeur with beauty, derives a pleasing, but a serious emotion.

IN the second place, As joy, tempered by fear, suits the nature of religion, so it is requisite for the proper regulation of the conduct of man. Let his joy flow from the best and purest source ; yet, if it remain long unmixed, it is apt to become dangerous to virtue. As waters which are never stirred, nor troubled, gather a sediment, which putrifies them ; so the undisturbed continuance of placid sensations engenders disorders in the human soul. It is wisely ordered in our present state, that joy and fear, hope and grief, should act alternately, as checks and balances upon each other, in order to prevent an excess in any of them, which our nature could not bear. If we were subject to no alarms of danger, the wisest would soon become improvident ; and the most humble, presumptuous. Man is a pilgrim upon earth. Were his path to be always smooth and flowery, he would be tempted to relinquish his guide, and to forget the purpose of his journey. Caution and fear are the shields of happiness. Unguarded joy begets indolence ; indolence produces security ; security leads to rashness ; and rashness ends in ruin. In order to rejoice
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long, it is necessary that we *rejoice with trembling*. Had our first parents observed this rule, man might have been still in paradise. He who saith in his heart, *My mountain stands strong; I shall never be moved*; may be assured, that his state already begins to totter. Religion, therefore, performs a kind office, in giving us the admonition of the Text. It inspires cheerfulness in the service of God. It proposes joy, as our chief spring of action. But it supports joy, by guarding it with fear; not suppressing, but regulating its indulgence; requiring us to rejoice, like persons who have obtained a treasure, which, through want of vigilance, they are exposed to lose. Dependent beings are formed for submission; and to submit, is to stand in awe. *Because the Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad*. We are the subjects of God; and therefore may justly rejoice. But still we are subjects; and therefore, trembling must mix itself with our joy.

IN the third place, The unstable condition of all human things, naturally inspires fear in the midst of joy. The spirit to which religion forms us, must undoubtedly correspond to the state in which we are placed, and to the part which is assigned us to act. Now the first view under which our present state appears, is that of fallen creatures, who are undergoing, is this world, probation and trial for their recovery; and are commanded to *work out their salvation with fear and trembling*. This view of our condition infers not habitual dejection of mind. It requires not melancholy abstraction from the affairs, or total contempt of the amusements, of life. But it inspires humility. It enforces dependance on Divine aid; and calls forth the voice of supplication to Heaven. In a situation so critical, and where interests so important are at a stake, every reasonable person must confess, that seriousness ought to temper rejoicing.

WERE there in human life any fixed point of stability

stability and rest, attainable by man; could we at any one moment, assure ourselves, that there remained no latent source of danger, either to our temporal, or our spiritual state; then I admit, we might lay trembling aside, and rejoice in full security. But alas! no such safe station, no such moment of confidence, is allowed to man during his warfare on earth. Vicissitudes of good and evil, of trials and consolations, fill up his life. The best intentioned are sometimes betrayed into crimes; the most prudent, overwhelmed with misfortunes. The world is like a wheel incessantly revolving, on which human things alternately rise and fall. What is past of our life, has been a chequered scene. On its remaining periods uncertainty and darkness rest. Futurity is an unknown region, into which no man can look forward without awe, because he cannot tell what forms of danger or trial may meet him there. This we know well, that in every period of our life, the path of happiness shall be found steep and arduous; but swift and easy, the descent to ruin. What, with much exertion of care and vigilance, we had built up, one unwearied action may, in an evil hour, overthrow. The props of human confidence are, in general, insecure. The sphere of human pleasures is narrow. While we form schemes for strengthening the one, and for enlarging the other, death, mean while, advances. Life, with a swift, though insensible volume glides away; and like a river which undermines its banks, gradually impairs our state. Year after year steals something from us; till the decaying fabric totters of itself, and crumble at length into dust. So that, whether we consider life or death, time or eternity, all things appear to concur in giving to man the admonition of the Text, *Rejoice with trembling.*

I HAVE now shown, in what respects religion both promotes joy, and inspires seriousness. It places us

in the most favourable situation, which human life affords, for joy; and it gives us every assistance, for relishing that joy. It renders it our duty, to cultivate the satisfaction which it yields. It demands a cheerful spirit, in order to ascertain the sincerity of our principles, and to confirm us in good practice. At the same time, the joy which it inspires, is tempered with fear, by the genius of religion itself; by the dangers to which unguarded joy would expose us; and by the impropriety of indulging it, in a situation so mixed as the present. The *trembling* which is here enjoined, is not to be understood as signifying a pusillanimous dejection. It imports no more than that caution and sobriety, which produce dictates, as belonging to our state. By connecting such trembling with our joy, religion means to recommend to us, a cheerful, but a composed, spirit, equally remote from the humiliating depression of fear, and the exulting levity of joy. Always to rejoice, is to be a fool. Always to tremble, is to be a slave. It is a modest cheerfulness, a chastened joy, a manly seriousness, which becomes the servant of God.

BUT is this, it may perhaps be said, the whole amount of that boasted satisfaction which religion bestows? Is this all the compensation which it makes, for those sacrifices it exacts? Are not the terms which vice holds out, far more enticing, when it permits us to gratify every desire; and, in return for our surmounting the temerous scruples of conscience, promises us a life of gaiety, festivity, and unrestrained joy?—Such promises, vice may indeed make; but, how far it fulfils them, we may safely refer to the determination of the greatest sensualist, when he has finished his career, and looks back on what he has enjoyed. Ask him, Whether he would recommend to his children, and his friends, to hold the same course; and whether, with his dying breath, he dare assure them, that the gratifications of licentiousness

ousness afford the greatest enjoyment of life? Whatever hopes vice may at the beginning inspire, yet, after the trial is made, it has been always found, that criminal pleasures are the bane of happiness; the poison, not the cordial, of our present state. They are pleasures, compensated by an infinite overbalance of pain; moments of delight, succeeded by years of regret; purchased at the expence of injured reputation, broken health, and ruined peace. Even abstracting from their pernicious consequences, they are for most part, in themselves treacherous pleasures; unsound and disturbed in the moments of enjoyment. *In the midst of such laughter, the heart is sorrowful.* Often is the limbe of gaiety assumed, while the heart akes within: And though folly may laugh, guilt will sting. Correcting this pernicious phrenzy of pleasure, and reducing into a more sober and regulated state, religion is in truth, no other than wisdom, introducing peace and order into the life of man.

While religion condemns such pleasures as are immoral, it is chargeable with no improper austerity, in respect of those which are of an innocent kind. Think not, that by the cautious discipline which it prescribes, it excludes you from all gay enjoyment of life. Within the compass of that sedate spirit, to which it forms you, all that is innocently pleasing will be found to lie. It is a mistake to imagine, that, in constant effusions of giddy mirth, or in that flutter of spirits which is excited by a round of diversions, the chief enjoyment of our state consists. Were this the case, the vain and the frivolous would be on better terms for happiness, than the wise, the great, and the good. To arrange the plans of amusement, or to preside in the haunts of jollity, would be more desirable, than to exert the highest effort of mental powers for the benefit of nations. A consequence so absurd, is sufficient to explode the principle from which it flows. To the amusements and lesser joys

of the world, religion assigns their proper place. It admits them, as relaxations from care, as instruments of promoting the union of men, and of enlivening their social intercourse. But though, as long as they are kept within due bounds, it does not censure nor condemn them; neither does it propose them as rewards to the virtuous, or as the principal objects of their pursuit. To such, it points out nobler ends of action. Their felicity it engages them to seek, in the discharge of an useful, an upright, and honourable part in life; and, as the habitual tenour of their mind, it promotes cheerfulness, and discourages levity.

Between these two there is a wide distinction; and the mind which is most open to levity, is frequently a stranger to cheerfulness. It has been remarked, that transports of intemperate mirth, are often no more than flashes from the dark cloud; and that, in proportion to the violence of the effulgence, is the succeeding gloom. Levity may be the forced production of folly or vice; cheerfulness is the natural offspring of wisdom and virtue only. The one is an occasional agitation; the other, a permanent habit. The one degrades the character; the other is perfectly consistent with the dignity of reason, the steady and manly spirit of religion. To aim at a constant succession of high and vivid sensations of pleasure, is an idea of happiness altogether chimerical. Calm and temperate enjoyment, is the utmost that is allotted to men. Beyond this, we struggle in vain to raise our state; and, in fact, depress our joys, by endeavouring to heighten them. Instead of those fallacious hopes of perpetual festivity, with which the world would allure us, religion confers upon us a cheerful tranquility. Instead of dazzling us with meteors of joy, which sparkle and expire, it sheds around us, a calm and steady light. By mixing *trembling* with our joy, it renders that joy
more

more solid, more equal, and more lasting.

In this spirit, then, let us serve God, and hold our course through life. Let us approach to the Divine Being, as to a sovereign of whom we stand in awe, and to a father in whom we trust. In our conduct, let us be cautious and humble, as those who have ground to fear; well pleased and cheerful, as those who have cause to rejoice. Let us show the world, that a religious temper, is a temper, sedate, not sad; that a religious behaviour, is a behaviour, regulated, not stiff and formal. Thus we shall *use the world, as not abusing it*; we shall pass through its various changes, with the least discomposure; and we shall vindicate religion, from the reproaches of those who would attribute to it, either enthusiastic joys, or slavish terrors. We shall show, that it is a rational rule of life, worthy of the perfection of God, and suited to the nature and state of man.

S E R M O N XV.

GALAT. vi. 9.

And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

DISCONTENT is the most general of all the evils which trouble the life of man. It is a disease, which every where finds materials to feed itself; for, if real distresses be wanting, it substitutes such as are imaginary in their place. It converts even the good things of the world, when they have been long enjoyed, into occasions of disgust. In the midst of prosperity, it disposes us to complain; and renders tranquillity tiresome, only because it is uniform.

There is no wonder, that this spirit of restlessness and dissatisfaction, which corrupts every terrestrial enjoyment, should have sometimes penetrated into the region of virtue. Good men are not without their frailties; and the perverseness incident to human nature, to readily leads us, who become weary of all other things, to *be weary, also in well-doing.*

Let me put a case, which perhaps, will be found not unfrequent in ordinary life. Suppose a person, after much commerce with the world, to be convinced of its vanity. He has seen its most flattering hopes to be fallacious. He has felt its most boasted pleasures to be unsatisfactory. He resolves, therefore, to place his happiness in virtue; and disregarding all temptations from interest, to adhere to what is right and honourable in conduct. He cultivates acquaintance with religion. He performs, with seriousness, the offices of devotion. He lays down to himself, a rational and useful plan of life; and, with satisfaction, holds on for a while in this reformed course. But, by degrees, discouragements arise. The peace which he hoped to enjoy, is interrupted, either by his own frailties, or by the vices of others. Passions, which had not been thoroughly subdued, struggle for their accustomed gratification. The pleasure which he expected to find in devotion, sometimes fails him; and the injustice of the world often sours and frets him. Friends prove ungateful; enemies misrepresent, rivals supplant him: And part, at least, of the mortifications which he suffers, he begins to ascribe to virtue.—Is this all the reward of my serving God, and renouncing the pleasures of sin? *Verily in vain I have cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocency. Behold the ungodly prosper in the world, and have more than heart can wish; while, all the day long, I am plagued and chastened every morning.*—To such persons as these, and to all who are in hazard of being infected with their

their spirit, I now address myself. In reply to their complaints, I purpose to show, That in no state they can choose on earth, by no plan of conduct they can form, it is possible for them to escape uneasiness and disappointment; that in a life of virtue, they will suffer less uneasiness, and fewer disappointments, than in a course of vice; they will possess much higher resources and advantages; and they will be assured of compleat reward at the end. From these considerations, I hope to make it appear, that there is no sufficient reason for our being *wearry in well-doing*; and that taking human life upon the whole, Virtue is far the most eligible portion of man.

I. UNEASINESS and disappointment are inseparable, in some degree, from every state on earth. Were it in the power of the world, to render those who attach themselves to it, satisfied and happy, you might then, I admit, have some title to complain, if you found yourselves placed upon worse terms in the service of God. But this is so far from being the case, that among the multitudes who devote themselves to earthly pleasure, you will not find a single person who has compleatly attained his aim. Enquire into the condition of the high and the low, of the gay and the serious, of the men of business and the men of pleasure, and you shall behold them all occupied, in supplying some want, or in removing some distress. No man is pleased with being precisely what he is. Every where there is a void; generally, even in the most prosperous life, there is some corner possessed by sorrow. He who is engaged in business, pines for leisure. He who enjoys leisure, languishes for want of employment. In a single state, we envy the comforts of a family. In conjugal life, we are chagrined with domestic cares. In a safe station, we regret the want of objects for enterprise. In an enterprising life, we lament the want of safety. It is the doom of man,

that his sky should never be free from all clouds. He is, at present, in an exiled and fallen state. The objects which surround him, are beneath his native dignity. God has tinged them all with vanity, on purpose to make him feel, that this is not his rest; that here he is not in his proper place, nor arrived at his true home.

If, therefore, you aim at a condition which shall be exempted from every disquiet, you pursue a phantom; you increase the vanity and vexation of life, by engaging in a chace so fruitless. If you complain of virtue, because there is incident to it a portion of that uneasiness which is found in every other state, your complaint is most unreasonable. You claim an immunity from evil, which belongs not to the lot of man. Reconcile yourselves, then, to your condition; and, instead of looking for perfect happiness any where on earth, gladly embrace that state which contains the fewest sorrows.

II. **THOUGH** no condition of human life is free from uneasiness, I contend, That the uneasiness belonging to a sinful course, is far greater, than what attends a course of well-doing. If you be weary of the labours of virtue, be assured, that the world, whenever you try the exchange, will lay upon you a much heavier load. It is the outside, only, of a licentious life, which is gay and smiling. Within, it conceals toil, and trouble, and deadly sorrow. For vice poisons human happiness in the spring, by introducing disorder into the heart. Those passions which it seems to indulge, it only feed with imperfect gratifications; and thereby strenghtens them for preying, in the end on their unhappy victims.

It is a great mistake to imagine, that the pain of self-denial is confined to virtue. He who follows the world, as much as he who follows Christ, must *take up his cross*; and to him, assuredly it will prove a more oppressive burthen. Vice allows all our passions to range uncontrouled; and where
each

each claims to be superiour, it is impossible to gratify all. The predominant desire can only be indulged at the expence of its rival. No mortifications which virtue exacts, are more severe than those, which ambition imposes upon the love of ease, pride upon interst, and covetousness upon vanity. Self-denial, therefore, belongs, in common, to vice and virtue; but with this remarkable difference, that the passions which virtue requires us to mortify, it tends to weaken; whereas, those which vice obliges us to deny, it, at the same time, strenghtens. The one diminishes the pain of self-denial, by moderating the demand of passion; the other increases it, by rendering those demands imperious and violent.---What distresses that occur in the calm life of virtue, can be compared to those tortures, which remorse of conscience inflicts on the wicked; to those severe humiliations, arising from guilt combined with misfortunes, which sink them to the dust; to those violent agitations of shame and disappointment, which sometimes drive them to the most fatal extremities, and make them abhor their existence? How often, in the midst of those disastrous situations, into which their crimes have brought them, have they cursed the seductions of vice; and, with bitter regret, looked back to the day on which they first forsook the path of innocence!

But, perhaps, you imagine, that to such miseries as these, great criminals only are exposed; and that, by a wary and cautious management, it is possible to avoid them. Take vice and virtue, then, in the most general point of view. Compare God and the world as two masters, the one or other of whom you must obey; and consider fairly, in whose service their will be reason for your being weary soonest, and repenting most frequently. The world is both a hard, and a capricious master. To submit to a long servitude, in the view of a recompense

from which they are excluded in the end, is known to be often the fate of those, who are devoted to the world. They sacrifice their present ease, to their future prospects. They court the great, and flatter the multitude. They prostitute their conscience, and dishonour their character: And, after all their efforts, how uncertain is their success! Competitors juggle, and outstrip them. The more artful deceive, the more violent overthrow them. Fair prospects once smiled; but clouds soon gather; the sky is darkened; the scene changes; and that fragile world, which, a moment before, had flattered, the next moment, forgets them.

God is never mistaken in the character of his servants; for he *seeth their hearts, and judgeth according to the truth.* But the world is often deceived in those who court its favour; and, of course, is unjust in the distribution of its rewards. Flattery gains the ear of power. Fraud supplants innocence; and the pretending, and assuming, occupy the place of the worthy and the modest. In vain you claim any merit with the world, on account of your good intentions. The world knows them not; regards them not. It judges of you solely by your action; and, what is worse, by the success of your actions, which often depends not on yourselves. But, in the sight of the Supreme Being, good intentions supply the place of good deeds, which you had not the opportunity of performing. The wellmeant endeavours of the poor, find the same acceptance with him, as the generous actions of the rich. The *widow's mite*, is, in his eye, a costly offering; and even he *who giveth to a disciple a cup of cold water*, when he can give him no more, *goeth not without his reward.*

As the world is unjust in its judgments, so it is ungrateful in its requitals. Time speedily effaces the memory of the greatest services; and when we can repeat them no more, we are neglected, and
thrown

thrown aside. It was the saying of a noted great man of the world, on the fall of his fortunes, "Had I served God as faithfully as I have done my King, he would not have cast me off in my old age. Unfaithfulness, and ingratitude, are unknown to God. With him no new favourites arise, to usurp the place, or to bear off the rewards, of his ancient servants. *Even to your old age, I am He; and even to hoary hairs, I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you, saith the Lord Almighty*."—Since, then, in our several departments, we must labour, What comparison is there, between labouring for God, and for the world? How unjust are they, who become weary so much sooner in the service of God, than they do in that of the most severe and imperious of all masters!

III. THE resources of virtue are much greater than those of the world; the compensations which it makes; for our distresses, far more valuable. Perpetual success belongs neither to the one nor the other. But under disappointments, when they occur, virtue bears us up; the world allows us to sink. When the mind of a good man is hurt by misfortunes, religion administers the cordial, and infuse, the balm. Whereas the world inflicts wounds, and then leaves them to fester. It brings sorrows, but it provides no consolation. Consolation is entirely the providence of religion. Supposing religion to be inferior to vice in external advantages, it must be allowed to possess internal peace, in a much higher degree. This is so certain, that almost all men, at some period or other of their life, look forward to it, as to a desirable retreat. When the ends of their present pursuit shall be accomplished, they purpose to themselves much satisfaction, in an honourable discharge of the duties of their station, amidst those moderate passions, and temperate pleasures, which innocence allows.

allows. That which all men agree in holding to be second in importance to the pursuit which they follow, may be safely esteemed to be the first in real worth; and it may be concluded, that if they were not blinded by some prevailing passion, they would discern and adopt it as such.

It is the peculiar effect of virtue, to make a man's chief happiness arise from himself and his own conduct. A bad man is wholly the creature of the world. He hangs upon its favour, lives by its smiles, and is happy or miserable, in proportion to his success. But to a virtuous man, success, in worldly undertakings, is but a secondary object. To discharge his own part with integrity and honour, is his chief aim. If he has done properly what was incumbent on him to do, his mind is at rest; to Providence he leaves the event. *His witness is in heaven, and his record is on high.* Satisfied with the approbation of God, and the testimony of a good conscience, he enjoys himself, and despises the triumphs of gilt. In proportion as such manly principles rule your heart, you will become independent of the world; and will forbear complaining of its discouragements. It is the imperfection of your virtue, which occasions you to be *wearied in well-doing*. It is because your hearts remain divided between God and the world, that you are so often discontented; partly wishing to discharge your duty, and partly seeking your happiness from somewhat that is repugnant to your duty. Study to be more consistent in principle, and more uniform in practice, and your peace will be more unbroken.

Though virtue may appear at first sight to contract the bounds of employment, you will find, upon reflection, that, in truth, it enlarges them. If it restrains the excess of some pleasures, it favours and increases others. It precludes you from none, but such as are either fantastick and imaginary, or pernicious.

pernicious and destructive. Whatever is truly valuable in human enjoyment, it allows to a good man, no less than to others. It not only allows him such pleasures, but heightens them, by that greatful relish which a good conscience gives to every pleasure. It not only heightens them, but adds to them, also, the peculiar satisfactions which flow from virtuous sentiments, from devout affections, and religious hopes. On how much worse terms is the sinner placed, in the midst of his boasted gratifications? His portion is confined to this world. His good things are all of one sort only; he has neither knowledge, nor relish, of any thing beyond them. His enjoyment, therefore, rests on a much narrower basis, than that of the servants of God. Enlarge, as much as you please the circle of worldly gratifications; yet, if nothing of the mind and the heart, nothing of a refined and moral nature, enter into that circle, and vary the enjoyment, langour and weariness soon succeed. Among whom do you hear more peevish expressions of discontent, or more frequent complaints of low spirits, than among the professed votaries of worldly pleasure?

Vice and virtue, in their progress, as in every other respect, hold an opposite course. The beginnings of vice are enticing. The first steps of worldly advancement, are flattering and pleasing. But the continuance of success blunts enjoyment, and flattering desire. Whereas the beginnings of virtue are laborious. But, by perseverance, its labours diminish, and its pleasures increase. As it ripens into confirmed habit it becomes both smoother in practice, and more compleat in its reward. In a worldly life, the termination of our hopes all ways meets our view. We see a boundary before us, beyond which we cannot reach. But the prospects of virtue are growing, and endless. *The righteous shall hold on in his way; and he that hath clean hands, shall wax stronger and stronger. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more*

more unto the perfect day. This brings me to consider,

IV. THE assured hope, which good men enjoy, of a full reward at last. I have endeavoured, by several considerations, to correct your impatience under the present discouragements of virtue. I have shown many high advantages, which it already possesses. But now, laying all these aside; supposing virtue to have brought you no advantage, but to have only engaged you in perpetual struggles with an evil world; the Text suggests what is sufficient to answer every objection, and to silence every complaint; *In due season you shall reap, if you faint not.* It is not a loose encouragement, or a dubious hope, which is held forth to us. A direct and explicit declaration is made by the Spirit of God, that piety and virtue, how discouraged soever, or oppressed, they may be for a while, shall not be frustrated of their reward; but that *in due season*, when the period which is fixed by the Divine decree shall come, all who have not been *weary in well-doing*, though they may *have sown in tears*, shall *reap in joy*. As this great principle of faith is so essential to our present argument, and is indeed the foundation of all religion, it will be proper that we now take a view of the grounds on which it rests. By fixing our attention, both on the proofs which reason suggests, and on the discoveries which revelation has made, of a state of future retribution, we shall take an effectual method of confirming our adherence to religion, and of baffling those temptations which might lead us to *be weary in well-doing*.

THE first, and most obvious presumption, which reason affords in behalf of future rewards to the righteous, arises from the imperfect distribution of good and evil in our present state. Notwithstanding what I have advanced concerning the pleasures and advantages of virtue it cannot be denied, that the happiness

happiness of good men is often left incomplete. The vicious possess advantages, to which they have no right; while the conscientious suffer for the sake of virtue, and groan under distresses which they have not merited from the world. Indeed, were the distribution of good and evil, in this life, altogether promiscuous; could it be said, with truth, that the moral condition of men had no influence whatever upon their happiness or misery; I admit, that from such a state of things, no presumption would arise, of any future retribution being intended. They who delight to aggravate the miseries of life, and the distresses of virtue, do no service to the argument in behalf of Providence. For, if total disorder be found to prevail now, suspicions may, too justly, arise, of its prevailing for ever. If he who rules the universe, entirely neglects virtue here, the probability must be small, of his rewarding it hereafter. But this is far from being the true state of the fact. What human life presents to the view of an impartial observer is by no means a scene of entire confusion; but a state of order, begun, and carried on a certain length. Virtue is so far from being neglected by the Governour of the world, that from many evident marks, it appears to be a chief object of his care. In the constitution of human nature, a foundation is laid, for comfort to the righteous, and for internal punishment to the wicked. Throughout the course of Divine government, tendencies towards the happiness of the one, and the misery of the other, constantly appear. They are so conspicuous, as not to have escaped the notice of the rudest nations. Over the whole earth, they have diffused the belief, that Providence is propitious to virtue, and adverse to guilt. Yet these tendencies are, sometimes disappointed of their effect; and that which Providence visibly favours, is left, at present, without an adequate reward.

From such an imperfect distribution of happiness, what are we to conclude, but, that this system is the
beginning

beginning, not the whole of things; the opening only of a more extensive plan, whose consummation reaches into a future world? If God has already *set his throne for judgment*; if he has visibly begun to reward and to punish, in some degree, on earth, he cannot mean to leave the exercise of government incomplete. Having laid the foundation of a great and noble structure, he will in due time rear it up to perfection. The unfinished parts of the fabrick evidently shew, that a future building is intended. All his other works are constructed according to the most full and exact proportion. In the natural world, nothing is deficient, nothing redundant. It is in the moral world, only, that we discover irregularity and defect. It falls short of that order and perfection, which appear in the rest of the creation. It exhibits not in its present state, the same features of complete wisdom, justice, or goodness. But can we believe, that, under the government of the Supreme Being, those apparent disorders shall not be rectified at the last? Or, that from his conduct towards his rational creatures, the chief of his works, the sole objection against his perfection shall be allowed to rise, and shall continue unremoved for ever.

On the supposition of future rewards and punishments, a satisfying account can be given, of all the disorders which at present take place on earth. Christianity explains their origin, and traces them to their issue. Man, fallen from his primæval felicity, is now undergoing probation and discipline for his final state. Divine justice remains, for a season, concealed; and allows men to act their parts with freedom on this theatre, that their characters may be formed and ascertained. Amidst discouragements and afflictions, the righteous give proof of their fidelity, and acquire the habits of virtue. But if you suppose the events of this life to have no reference to another, the whole state of man becomes, not only
inexplicable

inexplicable but contradictory, and inconsistent. The powers of the inferior animals are perfectly suited to their station. They know nothing higher than their present condition. In gratifying their appetites, they fulfil their destiny, and pass away. Man, alone, comes forth to act a part, which carries no meaning, and tends to no end. Endowed with capacities, which extend far beyond his present sphere; fitted by his rational nature, for running the race of immortality, he is stopped short in the very entrance of his course. He squanders his activity on pursuits, which he discerns to be vain. He languishes for knowledge, which is placed beyond his reach. He thirsts after a happiness, which he is doomed never to enjoy. He sees, and laments the disasters of his state; and yet upon this supposition, can find nothing to remedy them—Has the eternal God any pleasure in sporting himself with such a scene of misery and folly, as this life, if it had no connection with another, must exhibit to his eye?—Did he call into existence this magnificent universe, adorn it with so much beauty and splendour, and surround it with those glorious luminaries which we behold in the heavens, only that some generations of mortal men might arise to behold these wonders, and then disappear for ever? How unsuitable, in this case, were the habitation to the wretched inhabitant! How inconsistent the commencement of his being, and the mighty preparation of his powers and faculties, with his despicable end! How contradictory, in fine, were every thing which concerns the state of man, to the wisdom and perfection of his Maker!

Throughout all ages, and among all nations, the persuasion of a future life has prevailed. It sprung not from the refinements of science, or the speculations of philosophy; but from a deeper and stronger root, the natural sentiments of the human heart. Hence it is common to the philosopher and the savage;

vage; and is found in the most barbarous, as well as in the most civilised regions. Even the belief of the being of a God, is not more general on the earth, than the belief of immortality. Dark, indeed, and confused, were the notions which men entertained concerning a future state. Yet still, in that state, they looked for retribution, both to the good, and the bad; and in the perfection of such pleasures, as they knew best, and valued most highly, they placed the rewards of the virtuous. So universal a consent seems plainly to indicate, an original determination given to the soul by its Creator. It shows this great truth, to be native and congenial to man.

When we look into our own breasts, we find various anticipations and presages of future existence. Most of our great and high passions, extend beyond the limits of this life. The ambitious and the self-denied, the great, the good, and the wicked, all take interest, in what is to happen after they shall have left the earth. That passion for fame, which inspires so much of the activity of mankind, plainly is animated by the persuasion, that consciousness is to survive the dissolution of the body. The virtuous are supported by the hope, the guilty tormented with the dread, of what is to take place after death. As death approaches, the hopes of the one, and the fears of the other, are found to redouble. The soul, when issuing hence, seems more clearly to discern its future abode. All the operations of conscience, proceed upon the belief of immortality. The whole moral conduct of men refers to it. All legislators have supposed it. All religions are built upon it. It is so essential to the order of society, that were it erased, human laws would prove ineffectual restraints from evil, and a deluge of crimes and miseries would overflow the earth. To suppose this universal and powerful belief to be without foundation in truth, is to suppose, that a principle of delusion

tion was interwoven with the nature of man; is to suppose, that this Creator was reduced to the necessity of impressing his heart with a falsehood, in order to make him answer the purposes of his being.

BUT though these arguments be strong, yet all arguments are liable to objection. Perhaps, this general belief, of which I have spoken, has being owing to inclination and desire, more than to evidence. Perhaps, in our reasonings on this subject from the Divine perfections, we flatter ourselves with being of more consequence, than we truly are, in the system of the universe. Hence the great importance of a discovery preceeding from God himself, which gives full authority to all that reason had suggested, and places this capital truth beyond the reach of suspicion or distrust.

The method which Christianity has taken to convey to us the evidence of a future state, highly deserves our attention. Had the Gospel been addressed, like a system of philosophy, solely to the understanding of men; had it admired only at enlightening the studious and reflecting it, would have confined itself to abstract truth; it would have simply informed us, that the righteous are hereafter to be rewarded, and sinners to be punished. Such a declaration as that contained in the Text, would have been sufficient: *Be not weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not.* But the Gospel has not stopped, at barley announcing life and immortality to mankind. It was calculated for popular edification. It was intended to be the religion not merely of the few, whose understanding was to be informed; but of the many, also, whose imagination was to be impressed, and whose passions were to be awakened, in order to give the truth its due influence over them. Upon this account it not only reveals the certainty of a future state, but, in the person of the great Founder of our religion, exhibits a series

series of facts relating to it; by means of which, our senses, our imagination, and passions, all become interested in this great object.

The resurrection of Christ from the grave, was designed to be a sensible evidence, that death infers not a final extinction of the living principle. He rose, in order to show, that, in our name, he had conquered death, and was *become the first fruits of them that sleep*. Nor did he only rise from the grave, but by ascending to heaven in a visible form, before many witnesses, give an ocular specimen of the transition from this world, into the region of the blessed. The employments which now occupy him there, are fully declared. *As our fore-runner, he hath entered within the veil. He appears in the presence of God for us, He maketh perpetual intercession for his people. I go, saith he, to my Father and your Father, to my God and to your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.* The circumstances of his coming again, are distinctly foretold. The sounding of the last trumpet, the resurrection of the dead. The appearance of the Judge, and the solemnity with which he shall discriminate the good from the bad, are all described. The very words in which he shall pronounce the final sentence, are recited in our hearing: *Come, ye blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* Then shall the holy and the just be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. They shall enter with him into the city of the living God. They shall possess the new earth and new heavens, wherein dwelleth righteousness. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. They shall behold his face in righteousness, and be satisfied with his likeness for ever. — By recording such a train of striking circumstances and facts, the Gospel familiarizes us
in

in some measure with a future state. By accommodating this great discovery, in so useful a manner, to the conceptions of men, it furnishes a strong intrinsic evidence of its divine origin.

THUS, upon whole, whether you consult your reason, or listen to the discoveries of revelation, you behold our argument confirmed; you behold a life of piety and virtue, issuing in immortal felicity. Of what worldly pursuit can it be pronounced, that its reward is certain? Look every where around you, and you shall see, that *the race is far from being always to the swift, or the battle to the strong*. The most diligent, the most wise, the accomplished, may, after all their labours, be disappointed in the end; and be left to suffer the regret, of having *spent their strength for nought*. But, for the righteous, is *laid up the crown of life*. Their final happiness is prepared in the eternal plan of Providence, and secured by the labours and sufferings of the Saviour of the world.

Cease, then, from your unjust complaints against virtue and religion. Leave discontent and peevishness, to worldly men. In no period of distress, in no moment of disappointment, allow yourselves to suspect, that piety and integrity are fruitless. In every state of being, they lead to happiness. If you enjoy not at present their full rewards, it is because the season of recompence is not yet come. For, *in due season you shall reap*. There is a time which is proper for reward; and there is a period which belongs to trial. How long the one should last, and when the other should arrive belongs not to you to determine. It is fixed by the wise, though unknown, decree of the Almighty. But, be assured, that *He that cometh, shall come, and will not tarry*. He shall come in *due season*, to restore perfect order among his works; to bring rest to the weary, comfort to the afflicted, and just retribution of all men. *Behold, saith the faithful*

*faithful and true Witness. I come quickly, and my reward is with me. To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. I will give him the morning star. I will make him a pillar in my temple. He shall be clothed in white raiment; and shall sit down with me, on my throne.**

S E R M O N XVI.

I CORINTH. XIV. 40.

Let all things be done — in order.

RELIGION, like every regular and well-connected system, is composed of a variety of parts, each of which possesses its separate importance, and contributes to the perfection of the whole. Some graces are essential to it; such as faith and repentance, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour; which, for that reason, must be often inculcated on men. There are other dispositions and habits which though they hold not so high a rank, yet are necessary to the introduction and support of the former; and therefore, in religious exhortations, these also justly claim a place. Of this nature is that regard to order, method, and regularity, which the apostle enjoins us in the text to carry through the whole of life. Whether you consider it as, in itself, a moral duty, or not, yet I hope soon to convince you that it is essential to the proper discharge of almost all duties; and merits upon that account a greater degree of attention than is commonly paid to it in a religious view.

If you look abroad into the world, you may be satisfied at the first glance, that a vicious and libertine life is always a life of confusion. Thence it is natural to infer that order is friendly to religion. As the neglect of it co-operates with vice, so the preservation of it must assist virtue. By the appointment of Providence, it is indispensably requisite to worldly prosperity. Thence arises a presumption that it is connected also with spiritual improvement. When you behold a man's affairs, through negligence and misconduct, involved in disorder, you naturally conclude that his ruin approaches. You may at the same time justly suspect, that the causes which affect his temporal welfare, operate also to the prejudice of his moral interests. The apostle teaches us in this chapter, that *God is not the author of confusion*. He is a lover of order; and all his works are full of order. But *wherever confusion is, there is, its close attendant, every evil work*. In the sequel of this discourse I shall point out some of those parts of conduct wherein it is most material to virtue that order take place; and then shall conclude with shewing the high advantages which attend it. Allow me to recommend to you, order in the conduct of your affairs; order in the distribution of your time; order in the management of your fortune; order in the regulation of your amusements; order in the arrangement of your society. Thus *let all things be done in order*.

I. MAINTAIN order in the conduct of your worldly affairs. Every man, in every station of life, has some concerns, private, domestic, or public, which require successive attention; he is placed in some sphere of active duty. Let the employments which belong to that sphere be so arranged, that each may keep its place, without jostling another; and that what regards the world may not interfere with what is due to God. In proportion to the multiplicity

city of affairs, the observance of order becomes more indispensable. But scarcely is there any train of life so simple and uniform but what will suffer through the neglect of it. I spake not now of suffering in point of worldly intrest. I call upon you to attend to higher intrests; to remember that the orderly conduct of your temporal affairs forms a great part of your duty as Christians.

Many, indeed, can hardly be persuaded of this truth. A strong propensity has, in every age, appeared among men to sequester religion from the commerce of the world. Seasons of retreat and devotion they are willing to appropriate to God. But the world they consider as their own province. They carry on a sort of separate intrest there. Nay, by the respect which, on particular occasions, they pay to religion, they too often imagine that they have acquired the liberty of acting in worldly matters according to what pain they chuse. How entirely do such persons mistake the design of Christianity!—In this world you were placed by Providence as on a great field of trial. By the necessities of your nature you are called forth to different employments. By many ties you are connected with human society. From superiours and inferiours, from neighbours and equals, from friends and enemies, demands arise, and obligations circulate through all the ranks of life. This active scene was contrived by the wisdom of heaven, on purpose that it might bring into exercise all the virtue of the christian character; your justice, candour and veracity in dealing with one another; your fidelity to every trust, and your conscientious discharge of every office, which is committed to you; your affection for your friends; your forgiveness of enemies; your charity to the distressed; your attention to the interests of your family. It is by fulfilling all these obligations, in proper succession, that you show your conversation to be such as becometh the
gospel

gospel of Christ. It is thus you make your light so to shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. It is thus you are rendered meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. — But how can those various duties be discharged by persons who are ever in that hurry and perplexity which disorder creates? You wish, perhaps, to perform what your character and station require. But from the confusion in which you have allowed yourselves to be involved, you find it to have become impossible. What was neglected to be done in its proper place, thrusts itself forward at an inconvenient season. A multitude of affairs crowd upon you together. Different obligations distract you; and this distraction is sometimes the cause, sometimes the pretence, of equally neglecting them all, or, at least, of sacrificing the greater to the latter.

Hence arise so many inconsistent characters, and such frequent instances of partial and divided goodness, as we find in the world; appearances of generosity without justice, honour without truth, probity to men without reverence to God. He who conducts his affairs with method and regularity, meets every duty in its proper place, and assigns in its due rank. But where there is no order in conduct, there can be no uniformity in character. The natural connexion and arrangement of duties is lost. If virtue appear at all, it will be only in fits and starts. The authority of conscience may occasionally operate, when our situation affords it room for exertion. But in other circumstances of equal importance, every moral sentiment will be overpowered by the tumultuous bustle of worldly affairs. Fretfulness of temper too, will generally characterize those who are negligent of order. The hurry in which they live, and the embarrassments with which they are surrounded, keep their spirits in perpetual ferment. Conflicting with difficulties which they are unable to overcome,

conscious of their own misconduct, but ashamed to confess it, they are engaged in many a secret struggle, and the uneasiness which they suffer within, recoils in bad humour on all who are around them. Hence the wretched resources to which, at last, they are obliged to fly, in order to quiet their cares. In despair of being able to unravel what they have suffered to become so perplexed, they sometimes sink into supine indolence, sometimes throw themselves into the arms of intemperance and loose pleasure; by either of which they aggravate their guilt, and accelerate their ruin. To the end that order may be maintained in your affairs, it is necessary.

He That you attend to order in the distribution of your time. Time you ought to consider as a sacred trust committed to you by God; of which you are now the depositaries, and are to render account at the last. That portion of it which he has allotted you is intended partly for the concerns of this world, partly for those of the next. Let each of these occupy in the distribution of your time that space which properly belongs to it. Let not the hours of hospitality and pleasure interfere with the discharge of your necessary affairs; and let not what you call necessary affairs encroach upon the time which is due to devotion. *To every thing there is a season, a time for every purpose under the heaven.* If you delay till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day, you overcharge the morrow with a burden which belongs not to it. You load the wheels of time, and prevent it from carrying you along smoothly. He who every morning plans the transactions of the day, and follows out that plan, carries on a thread which will guide him through the labyrinth of the most busy life. The orderly arrangement of his time is like a ray of light which darts itself through all his affairs. But where no plan is laid, where the disposal of time is surrendered merely to the chance of incidents, all things lie huddled together in one chaos, which

which admits neither of distribution nor review.

The first requisite for introducing order into the management of time, is to be impressed with a just sense of its value. Consider well how much depends upon it, and how fast it flies away. The bulk of men are in nothing more capricious and inconsistent than in their appreciation of time. When they think of it as the measure of their continuance on earth, they highly prize it, and with the greatest anxiety seek to lengthen it out. But when they view it in separate parcels, they appear to hold it in contempt, and squander it with inconsiderate profusion. While they complain that life is short, they are often wishing its different periods at an end. Covetous of every other possession, of time only they are prodigal. They allow every idle man to be master of this property, and make every frivolous occupation welcome that can help them to consume it. Among those who are so careless of time, it is not to be expected that order should be observed in its distribution. But by this fatal neglect, how many materials of severe and lasting regret are they laying up in store for themselves! The time which they suffer to pass away in the midst of confusion, bitter repentance seeks afterwards in vain to recall. What was omitted to be done at its proper moment, arises to be the torment of some future season. Manhood is disgraced by the consequences of neglected youth. Old age, oppressed by cares that belonged to a former period, labours under a burden not its own. At the close of life, the dying man beholds with anguish that his days are finishing, when his preparation for eternity is hardly commenced. Such are the effects of a disorderly waste of time, through not attending to its value. Every thing in the life of such persons is misplaced. Nothing is performed aright, from not being performed in due season.

But he who is orderly in the distribution of his

time, takes the proper method of escaping those manifold evils. He is justly said to *redeem the time*. By proper management, he prolongs it. He lives much in little space; more in a few years than others do in many. He can live to God and his own soul, and at the same time attend to all the lawful interests of the present world. He looks back on the past, and provides for the future. He catches and arrests the hours as they fly. They are marked down for useful purposes, and their memory remains. Whereas those hours fleet by the man of confusion like a shadow. His days and years are either blanks of which he has no remembrance, or they are filled up with such a confused and irregular succession of unfinished transactions, that though he remembers he has been busy, yet he can give no account of the business which has employed him. Of him, more than of any other, it may with justice be pronounced, that he, *walketh in a vain shew; he is disquieted in vain*.

III. INTRODUCE order into the management of your fortune. Whatever it be, let the administration of it proceed with method and oeconomy. From time to time examine your situation; and proportion your expence to your growing or diminishing revenue. Provide what is necessary, before you indulge in what is superfluous. Study to do justice to all with whom you deal, before you affect the praise of liberality. In a word, fix such a plan of living as you find that your circumstances will fairly admit, and adhere to it invariably against every temptation to improper excess.

No admonition respecting morals is more necessary than this to the age in which we live; an age manifestly distinguished by a propensity to thoughtless profusion; wherein all the different ranks of man are observed to press with forward vanity on those who are above them; to vie with their superiours in every mode of luxury and ostentation; and to seek no farther
their

ther argument for justifying extravagance, than the fashion of the times, and the supposed necessity of living like others around them. This turn of mind begets contempt for sober and orderly plans of life. It overthrows all regard to domestic concerns and duties. It pushes men on to hazardous and visionary schemes of gain; and unfortunately unites the two extremes, of grasping with rapaciousness, and of squandering with profusion. In the midst of such disorder no prosperity can be of long continuance. While confusion grows upon men's affairs, and prodigality at the same time wastes their substance, poverty makes its advances *like an armed man*. They tremble at the view of approaching evil; but have lost the force of mind to make provision against it. Accustomed to move in a round of society and pleasures disproportioned to their condition, they are unable to break through the enchantments of habit; and with their eyes open sink into the gulph which is before them. Poverty enforces dependance; and dependance increases corruption. Necessity first betrays them into vain compliances; next, impels them to open crimes; and beginning with ostentation and extravagance, they end in infamy and guilt. Such are the consequences of neglecting order in our worldly circumstances. Such is the circle in which the profligate and the dissolute daily run.—To what cause, so much as to the want of order, can we attribute those scenes of distress which so frequently excite our pity families that once were flourishing reduced to ruin; and the melancholy widow and neglected orphan thrown forth, friendless, upon the world? What cause has been more fruitful in ingendering those atrocious crimes which fill society with disquiet and terror; in training the gamester to fraud, the robber to violence, and even the assassin to blood?

Be assured, then that order, frugality, and economy are the necessary supports of every person's

and private virtue. How humble soever these qualities may appear to some, they are, nevertheless, the basis on which liberty, independence, and true honour, must rise. He who has the steadiness to arrange his affairs with method and regularity, and to conduct his train of life agreeable to his circumstances, can be master of himself in every situation into which he may be thrown. He is under no necessity to flatter or to lie; to stoop to what is mean, or to commit what is criminal. But he who wants that firmness of mind which the observance of order requires, is held in bondage to the world; he can neither act his part with courage as a man, nor with fidelity as a Christian. From the moment you have allowed yourselves to pass the line of œconomy, and to live beyond your fortune, you have entered on the path of danger. Precipices surrounded you on all sides. Every step which you take may lead to mischiefs that, as yet, lie hidden; and to crimes that will end in your everlasting perdition.

IV. OBSERVE order in your amusements; that is, allowed them no more than their proper place; study to keep them within due bounds; mingle them in a temperate succession with serious duties, and the higher business of life. Human life cannot proceed to advantage without some measure of relaxation and entertainment. We require relief from care. We are not formed for a perpetual stretch of serious thought. By too intense and continued application our feeble powers would soon be worn out. At the same time, from our propensity to ease and pleasure, amusement proves, among all ranks of men, the most dangerous foe to order. For it tends incessantly to usurp and encroach, to widen its territories, to thrust itself in the place of more important concerns, and thereby to disturb and counteract the natural course of things. One frivolous amusement indulged out of season, will often carry perplexity and confusion

confusion through a long succession of affairs. Amusements, therefore, though they be of an innocent kind, require steady government, to keep them within a due and limited province. But such as are of an irregular and vicious nature, require not to be governed, but to be banished from every orderly society. As soon as a man seeks his happiness from the gaming-table, the midnight-revel, and the other haunts of licentiousness, confusion seizes upon him as its own. There will no longer be order in his family, nor order in his affairs, nor order in his time. The most important concerns of life are abandoned. Even the order of nature is by such persons inverted; night is changed into day, and day into night. Character, honour, and interest itself, are trampled under foot. You may with certainty prognosticate the ruin of those men to be just at hand. Disorder, arisen to its height, has nearly accomplished its work. The spout of death are upon them. Let ever one who would escape the pestilential contagion fly with haste from their company.

V. PRESERVE order in the arrangement of your society; that is, entangle not yourselves in a perpetual and promiscuous crowd; select with prudence and propriety those with whom you chuse to associate; let company and retreat succeed each other at measured intervals. There can be no order in his life who allots not a due share of his time to retirement and reflection. He can neither prudently arrange his temporal affairs, nor properly attend to his spiritual interests. He lives not to himself, but to the world. By continual dissipation, he is rendered giddy and thoughtless. He contracts unavoidably from the world that spirit of disorder and confusion which is so prevalent in it.

It is not a sufficient preservative against this evil, that the circles of society in which you are engaged are not of a libertine and vicious kind. If they

withdraw you from that attention to yourselves, and your domestic concerns, which becomes a good man, they are subversive of order, and inconsistent with your duty. What is innocent in itself, degenerates into crime from being carried to excess; and idle, trifling society is nearly a-kin to such as is corrupting. One of the first principles of order is, to learn to be happy at home. It is in domestic retreat that every wise and virtuous man finds his chief satisfaction. It is there he forms the plans which regulate his public conduct. He who knows not how to enjoy himself when alone, can never be long happy abroad. To his vacant mind, company may afford a temporary relief; but when forced to return to himself, he will be so much more oppressed and languid. Whereas, by a due mixture of public and private life, we keep free of the snares of both, and enjoy each to great advantage.

WHEN we review those different parts of behaviour to which I have shewn that order is essential, it must naturally occur to you, that they all mutually connected, and hang upon each other. Throughout your affairs, your time, your expence, your amusements, your society, the principle of order must be equally carried, if you expect to reap any of its happy fruits. For if into any one of those great departments of life you suffer disorder to enter, it will spread through all the rest. In vain, for instance, you purpose to be orderly in the conduct of your affairs, if you be irregular in the distribution of your time. In vain your attempt to regulate your expence, if into your amusements, or your society, disorder has crept. You have admitted a principle of confusion which will defeat all your plans, and perplex and entangle what you sought to arrange. Uniformity is above all things necessary to order. If you desire that any thing should proceed according to method and rule, let *all things*, as the text exhorts,

exhorts, *be done in order.*

I must also admonish you, that in small, as well as in great affairs, a due regard to orders is requisite. I mean not that you ought to look on those minute attentions which are apt to occupy frivolous minds, as connected either with virtue or wisdom. But I exhort you to remember, that disorder, like other immoralities, frequently takes rise from inconsiderable beginnings. They who, in the lesser transactions of life, are totally negligent of rule, will be in hazard of extending that negligence by degrees to such affairs and duties as will render them criminal. Remissness grows on all who study not to guard against it; and it is only by frequent exercise that the habits of order and punctuality can be thoroughly confirmed.

FROM what has been said, the great importance of this principle to moral and religious conduct must already be evident. Let us, however, conclude with taking a summary view of the advantages which attend it.

First, the observance of order serves to correct that negligence which makes you omit some duties, and that hurry and precipitancy which makes you perform others imperfectly. Your attention is thereby directed to its proper object. You follow the straight path which Providence has pointed out to man; in the course of which all the different business of life presents itself regularly to him on every side. God and man, time and eternity, possess their proper stations, arise in succession to his view, and attract his care. Whereas he who runs on in a disorderly course, speedily involves himself in a labyrinth, where he is surrounded with intricacy and darkness. The crooked paths into which he strikes, turn him aside from the proper line of human pursuit; hide from his sight the objects which he ought chiefly to regard, and bring others under his view, which serve no purpose but to distract and mislead him.

Next, by attending to order, you avoid idleness, that most fruitful source of crimes and evils. Acting upon a plan, meeting every thing in its own place, you constantly find innocent and useful employment for time. You are never at a loss how to dispose of your hours, or to fill up life agreeably. In the course of human action, there are two extremes equally dangerous to virtue; the multiplicity of affairs, and the total want of them. The man of order stands in the middle between these two extremes, and suffers from neither. He is occupied, but not oppressed. Whereas the disorderly, overloading one part of time, and leaving another vacant, are at one period overwhelmed with business, and at another, either idle through want of employment, or indolent through perplexity. Those seasons of indolence and idleness, which recur so often in their life, are their most dangerous moments. The mind, unhappy in its situation, and clinging to every object which can occupy or amuse it, is then aptest to throw itself into the arms of every vice and every folly.

Farther, by the preservation of order, you check inconstancy and levity. Fickle by nature is the human heart. It is fond of change; and perpetually tends to start aside from the straight line of conduct. Hence arises the propriety of bringing ourselves under subjection to method and rule; which, though at first it may prove constraining, yet by degrees, and from the experience of its happy effects, becomes natural and agreeable. It rectifies those irregularities of temper and manners to which we give the name of caprice; and which are distinguishing characteristics of a disorderly mind. It is the parent of steadiness of conduct. It forms consistency of character. It is the ground of all the confidence we repose in one another. For, the disorderly we know not where to find. In him only can we place any

trust

trust who is uniform and regular; who lives by principle, not by humour; who acts upon a plan, and not by desultory motions.

The advantages of order hitherto mentioned belong to rectitude of conduct. Consider also how important it is to your self-enjoyment and felicity. Order is the source of peace, and peace is the highest of all temporal blessings. Order is indeed the only region in which tranquility dwells. The very mention of confusion imports disturbance and vexation. Is it possible for that man to be happy who cannot look into the state of his affairs, or the tenor of his conduct, without discerning all to be embroiled; who is either in the midst of remorse for what he has neglected to do, or in the midst of hurry to overtake what he finds, too late, was necessary to have been done? Such as live according to order may be compared to the celestial bodies which move in regular courses, and by stated laws; whose influence is beneficent; whose operations are quiet and tranquil. The disorderly resemble those tumultuous elements on earth, which, by sudden and violent irruptions, disturb the course of nature. By mismanagement of affairs, by excess in expence, by irregularity in the indulgence of company and amusement, they are perpetually creating molestation both to themselves and others. They depart from their road to seek pleasure; and instead of it, they every where raise up sorrows. Being always found out of their proper place, they of course interfere and jar with others. The disorders which they raise never fail to spread beyond their own line, and to involve many in confusion and distress; whence they necessarily become the authors of tumult and contention, of discord and enmity. Whereas order is the foundation of union. It allows every man to carry on his own affairs without disturbing his neighbour. It is the golden chain which holds together the societies

titles of men in friendship and peace.

In fine, the man of order is connected with all the higher powers and principles in the universe. He is the follower of God: He walks with him, and acts upon his plan. His character is formed on the spirit which religion breaths. For religion in general, and the religion of Christ in particular, may be called the great discipline of order. To *walk sinfully*, and to *walk disorderly*, are synonymous terms in Scripture. From *such as walk disorderly* we are commanded, *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to withdraw ourselves* *. The kingdom of Satan is the reign of disorder and darkness. To restore order among the works of God, was the end for which the Son of God descended to the earth. He requires order to be observed in his church. His undertaking is to be consummated in that perfect order which he shall introduce at the last day. In *the new earth and the new heavens*, undisturbed order shall for ever prevail among the *spirits of the just made perfect*; and whatever farther preparation may be requisite for our being admitted to join their society, it is certain that we shall never share in it, unless we make it now our study to *do all things decently and in order*.

S E R M O N XVII.

PROVERBS iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.

AMONG the many wise counsels given by this inspired writer, there is none which deserves greater

greater regard than that contained in the text. Its importance, however, is too seldom perceived by the generality of men. They are apt to consider the regulation of external conduct as the chief object of religion. If they can act their part with decency, and maintain a fair character, they conceive their duty to be fulfilled. What passes in the main time within their mind, they suppose to be of no great consequence either to themselves, or to the world. In opposition to this dangerous plan of morality, the wise man exhorts us *to keep the heart*; that is, to attend not only to our actions, but to our thoughts and desires; and *to keep their heart with all diligence*, that is, with sedulous and unremitting care; for which he assigns this reason, that, *out of the heart are the issues of life*.—In discoursing of this subject I purpose to consider, separately, the government of the thoughts, of the passions, and of the temper. But before entering on any of these, let us begin with enquiring in what sense *the issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart*; that we may discern the force of the argument which the text suggests, to recommend this great duty of *keeping the heart*.

The issues of life are justly said to be out of the heart, because the state of the heart is what determines our moral character, and what forms our chief happiness or misery.

FIRST, it is the state of the heart which determines our moral character. The tenor of our actions will always correspond to the dispositions that prevail within. To dissemble or to suppress them, is a fruitless attempt. In spite of our efforts, they will perpetually break forth in our behaviour. On whatever side the weight of inclination hangs, it will draw the practice after it. In vain therefore you study to preserve your hands clean, unless you resolve at the same time to keep your heart pure. *Make the tree good*, as our Saviour directs,

and

and then its fruits will be good also. For out of the heart proceed not only evil thoughts, but murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies *. If that fountain be once poisoned, you can never expect that salubrious streams will flow from it. Throughout the whole of their course, they will carry the taint of the parent spring.

But it is not merely from its influence on external action that the importance of the heart to our moral character arises. Independant of all action, it is, in truth, the state of the heart itself which forms our character in the sight of God. With our fellow creatures, actions must ever hold the chief rank; because, by these only we can judge of one another; by these we affect each other's welfare; and therefore to these alone the regulation of human law extends. But in the eye of that Supreme Being, to whom our whole internal frame is uncovered, dispositions hold the place of actions; and it is not so much what we perform, as the motive which moves us to performance, that constitutes us good or evil in his sight. Even among men, the morality of actions is estimated by the principle from which they are judged to proceed; and such as the principle is, such is the man accounted to be. One, for instance, may spend much of his fortune in charitable actions; and yet, if he is believed to be influenced by mere ostentation, he is deemed not charitable, but vain. He may labour unweariedly to serve the public; but if he is prompted by the desire of rising into power he is held not public spirited, but ambitious: And if he bestows a benefit purely that he may receive a greater in return, no man would reckon him generous, but selfish and interested. If reason thus clearly teaches us to estimate the value of actions by the dispositions which give them birth, it is an obvious conclusion, that according to those dispositions we are all ranked and classed by

him who seeth into every heart. The rectification of our principles of action is the primary object of religious discipline, and in proportion as this is more or less advanced, we are more or less religious. Accordingly, the regeneration of the heart is every where represented in the Gospel as the most essential requisite in the character of a Christian.

SECONDLY, the state of the heart not only determines our moral character, but forms our principal happiness or misery. External situations of fortune are no farther of consequence than as they operate on the heart; and their operation there is far from corresponding to the degree of worldly prosperity or adversity. If, from any internal cause a man's peace of mind be disturbed, in vain you load him with all the honours or riches which the world can bestow. They remain without, like things at a distance from him. They reach not the source of enjoyment. Discomposed thoughts, agitated passions, and a ruffled temper, poison every ingredient of pleasure which the world holds out, and overcast every object which presents itself, with a melancholy gloom. In order to acquire a capacity for happiness, it must be our first study to rectify such inward disorders. Whatever discipline tends to accomplish this purpose, is of greater importance to man than the acquisition of the advantages of fortune. These are precarious and doubtful in their effect; internal tranquillity is a certain good. These are only means; but that is the end. These are no more than instruments of satisfaction: that, is satisfaction itself.

Justly it is said by the Wise Man, that *he who hath no rule over his spirit, is like a city that is broken down and without walls* *. All is waste; all is in disorder and ruins within him. He possesses no defence against dangers of any sort. He lies open to every insurrection of ill-humour, and every invasion

vation of distress. Whereas he who is employed in regulating his mind is making provision against all the accidents of life. He is erecting a fortress into which, in the day of danger, he can retreat with safety. And hence, amidst those endeavours to secure happiness which incessantly employ the life of man, the careful regulation, or the improvident neglect of the inward frame, forms the chief distinction between wisdom and folly.

Thus it appears with how much propriety the *issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart*. Here rise those great springs of human conduct whence the main currents flow of our virtue, or our vice; of our happiness, or our misery. Besides this powerful argument for *keeping the heart with all diligence*, I must mention another important consideration taken from the present state of human nature. Think what your heart now is, and what must be the consequence of remitting your vigilance in watching over it. *When too much justice it is said in Scripture, to be deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* Its bias of innate corruption gives it a perpetual tendency downwards into vice and disorder. To direct and impel it upwards, requires a constant effort. Experience may convince you, that almost every desire has a propensity to wander into an improper direction; that every passion tends to excess; and that around your imagination there perpetually crowds a whole swarm of vain and corrupting thoughts. After all the care that can be bestowed by the best men on the regulation of the heart, it frequently baffles their efforts to keep it under proper discipline. Into what universal tumult then must it rise, if no vigilance may be employed, and no government be exercised over it? Inattention and remissness is all that the great adversary of mankind desires, in order to gain full advantage. While you sleep, he sows his tares in the field. The house which he finds vacant and

and ungarded, he presently garnishes with evil spirits.

Add to this, that the human temper is to be considered as a system, the parts of which have a mutual dependance on each other. Introduce disorder into any one part, and you derange the whole. Suffer but one passion to go out of its place, or to acquire an unnatural force, and presently the balance of the soul will be broken; its powers will jar among themselves, and their operations become discordant — *Keep thy heart therefore with all diligence*; for all thy diligence is here required. And though thine own keeping alone will not avail, unless the assistance of a higher power concur, yet of this be well assured, that no aid from heaven is to be expected, if thou shalt neglect to exert thyself in performing the part assigned thee,

HAVING now shown the importance of exercising government over the heart, I proceed to consider more particularly in what that government consists, as it respects the thoughts, the passions, and the temper.

I begin with the thoughts, which are the prime movers of the whole human conduct. All that makes a figure on the great theatre of the world, the employments of the busy, the enterprize of the ambitious, and the exploits of the warlike, the virtues which form the happiness, and the crimes which occasion the misery of mankind, originate in that silent and secret recess of thought which is hidden from every human eye. The secrecy and silence which reign there favour the prejudice entertained by too many, that thought is exempted from all controul. Passions, they perhaps admit, require government and restraint, because they are violent emotions and disturb society. But with their thoughts, they plead, no one is concerned. By these, as long as they remain in their bosom, no offence can be given,

and

and no injury committed. To enjoy unrestrained the full range of imagination, appears to them the native right and privilege of man. Had they to do with none but their fellow creature, such reasoning might be specious. But they ought to remember, that in the sight of the Supreme Being, thoughts bear the character of good or evil; as much as actions; and that they are, in especial manner, the subjects of divine jurisdictions because they are cognizable by no other tribunal. The moral regulation of our thoughts, is the particular test of our reverence for God. If we restrain our passions from breaking forth into open disorders, while we abandon our imagination in secret to corruption, we show that virtue rests with us upon regard to men; and that however we may act a part in public with propriety, there is before our eyes no fear of that God who *searcheth the heart*; and *requirerh truth in the inward parts*.

But even abstracting from this awful consideration, the government of our thoughts must appear to be of high consequence, from their direct influence on conduct. It is plain that thought gives the first impulse to every principle of action. Actions are, in truth, no other than thoughts ripened into consistency and substance. So certain is this, that to judge with precision of the character of any man, and to foretell with confidence what part he will act; no more were requisite, than to be rendered capable of viewing the current of thought which passes most frequently within him. Though by such a method we have no access to judge of one another, yet thus it is always in our power to judge of ourselves. Each of us, by impartially scrutinizing his indulged and favourite thoughts, may discover the whole secret of his real character. This consideration alone, is sufficient to show of what importance the government of thought is to the *keeping of the heart*.

BUT

BUT, supposing us convinced of its importance, a question may arise, How far it is within our power, and in what degree thoughts are subject to the command of the will? It is plain that they are not always the offspring of choice. Often they are inevitably expressed upon the mind by surrounding objects. Often they start up, as of themselves, without any principle of introduction which we are able to trace. *As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth,* equally rapid in its transition, and inscrutable in its progress, is the course of thought. Moving along a train of connections which are too delicate for our observation, it defeats all endeavours either to explore or to stop its path. Hence vain and fantastic imaginations sometimes break in upon the most settled attention, and disturb even the devout exercises of pious minds. Instances of this sort must be placed to the account of human frailty. They are misfortunes to be deplored, rather than crimes to be condemned; and our gracious Creator, who *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust,* will not be severe in marking every such error and wandering of the mind. But, after these allowances are made, still there remains much scope for the proper government of thought; and a multitude of cases occur, in which we are no less accountable for what we think, than for what we do.

As, first, when the introduction of any train of thought depends upon ourselves, and is our voluntary act; by turning our attention towards such objects, awakening such passions, or engaging in such employments as we know must give a peculiar determination to our thoughts. Next, when thoughts, by whatever accident they may have been originally suggested, are indulged with deliberation and complacency. Though the mind has been passive in their reception, and, therefore, free of blame; yet,

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BUT

if it be active in their continuance, the guilt becomes its own. They may have intruded at first, like unbidden guests; but if, when entered, are made welcome, and kindly entertained, the case is the same as if they had been invited from the beginning. If we be thus accountable to God for thoughts either voluntarily introduced, or deliberately indulged, we are no less so, in the last place, for those which find admittance into our hearts from supine negligence, from total relaxation of attention, from allowing our imagination to rove with entire licence, *like the eyes of the fool towards the ends of the earth*. Our minds are, in this case, thrown open to folly and vanity. They are prostituted to every evil thing which pleases to take possession. The consequences must all be charged to our account; and in vain we plead excuse from human infirmity. Hence it appears, that the great object at which we are to aim in governing our thoughts, is, to take the most effectual measures for preventing the introduction of such as are sinful, and for hastening their expulsion, if they shall have introduced themselves without consent of the will.

But when we descend into our breasts, and examine how far we have studied to keep this object in view, who can tell *how oft he has offended*? In no article of religion or morals are men more culpably remiss than in the unrestrained indulgence they give to fancy; and that too, for most part, without remorse. Since the time that Reason began to exert her powers, Thought, durine our walking hours, has been active in every breast, without a moment's suspension or pause. The current of ideas has been always flowing. The wheels of the spiritual engine have circulated with perpetual motion. Let me ask, what has been the fruit of this incessant activity with the great part of mankind? Of the innumerable hours that have been employed in thought, how few

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few are marked with any permanent or useful effect? How many have either passed away in idle dreams; or have been abandoned to anxious discontented musings, to unsocial and malignant passions, or to irregular and criminal desires? Had I power to lay open that storehouse of iniquity which the heart of too many conceal; could I draw out and read to them a list of all the imaginations they have devised, and all the passions they have indulged in secret; what a picture of men would I present of themselves? What crimes would they appear to have perpetrated in fancy, which to their most intimated companions they durst not reveal?

Even when men imagine their thoughts to be innocently employed, they too commonly suffer them to run out into extravagant imaginations, and chimerical plans of what they would wish to attain, or chuse to be, if they could frame their course of things according to their desire. Though such employments of fancy come not under the description with those which are plainly criminal, yet wholly unblameable they seldom are. Besides the waste of time which they occasion, and the misapplication which they indicate of those intellectual powers that were given to us for much nobler purposes, such romantic speculations lead us always into the neighbourhood of forbidden regions. They place us on dangerous ground. They are for the most part connected with some one bad passion; and they always nourish a giddy and frivolous turn of thought. They unfit the mind for applying with vigour to rational pursuits, or for acquiescing in sober plans of conduct. From that ideal world in which it allows itself to dwell, it returns to the commerce of men, unbent and relaxed, sickly and tainted, averse from discharging the duties, and sometimes disqualified ever for relishing the pleasures of ordinary life. O Jerusalem! wash thine heart from wickedness. How long

long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?—

In order to guard against all such corruptions and abuses of thought as I have mentioned, it may be profitable to attend to the following rules.

In the first place, study to acquire the habit of attention to thought. No study is more important; for in proportion to the degree in which this habit is possessed such commonly is the degree of intellectual improvement. It is the power of attention which in a great measure distinguishes the wise and the great from the vulgar and trifling herd of men. The latter are accustomed to think, or rather to dream, without knowing the subject of their thoughts. In their unconnected ravings, they pursue no end; they follow no tract. Every thing floats loose and disjointed on the surface of their mind; like leaves scattered and blown about on the face of the waters.

In order to lead your thoughts into any useful direction, your first care must be, to acquire the power of fixing them, and of restraining their irregular motions. Inure yourselves to form a plan of proper meditation; to pursue it steadily; and with severe authority to keep the door shut against intrusions of wandering fancy. Let your mind, for this purpose, become a frequent object to itself. Let your thoughts be made the subject of thought and review.—“To what is my attention at present directed? Could I disclose it without a blush to the world? Were God instantly to call me into judgment, what account could I give of it to him? Shall I be the wiser or the better for dwelling on such thoughts as now fill my mind? Are they entirely consistent with my innocence, and with my present and future peace? If they are not, to what purpose do I indulge such unprofitable or dangerous musings?”—By frequent exercise of this inward scrutiny, we might gradually bring imagination

gination under discipline, and turn the powers of thought to their proper use as means of improvement, instead of suffering them to be only the instruments of vanity and guilt.

IN the second place, in order to the government of thought, it is necessary to guard against idleness. Idleness is the great fomentor of all corruptions in the human heart. In particular, it is the parent of loose imaginations and inordinate desires. The ever active and restless power of thought, if not employed about what is good, will naturally and unavoidably engender evil. Imagine not that mere occupation, of whatever kind it be, will exempt you from the blame and danger of an idle life. Perhaps the worst species of idleness is dissipated, though seemingly busy life, spent in the haunts of loose society, and in the chase of perpetual amusement. Hence a giddy mind alternately elated and dejected with trifles; occupied with no recollection of the past but what is fruitless, and with no plans of the future but what are either frivolous or guilty.

As, therefore, you would govern your thoughts, or indeed as you would have any thoughts that are worthy of being governed, provide honourable employment for the native activity of your minds. Keep knowledge, virtue, and usefulness, ever in view. Let your life proceed in a train of such pursuits as are worthy of a Christian, of a rational and a social being. While these are regularly carried on as the main business of life, let amusement possess no more than its proper place in the distribution of your time. Take particular care that your amusements be of an irreproachable kind, and that all your society be either improving or innocent. So shall the stream of your thoughts be made to run in a pure channel. Manly occupations and virtues principles will expel the taint which idleness never fails to communicate to the vacant mind.

IN the third place, when criminal thoughts arise, attend to all the proper methods of speedily suppressing them. Take example from the unhappy industry which sinners discover in banishing good ones, when a natural sense of religion forces them on their conscience. How anxiously do they fly from themselves? how studiously do they drown the voice which upbraids them in the noise of company or diversion? what numerous artifices do they employ to evade the uneasiness which returns of reflexions would produce?—Were we to use equal diligence in preventing the entrance of vicious suggestions, or in repelling them when entered, why should we not be equally successful in a much better cause?—As soon as you are sensible that any dangerous passion begins to ferment, instantly call in other passions, and other ideas, to your aid. Hasten to turn your thoughts into a different direction. Summon up whatever you have found to be of power for composing harmonizing your mind. Fly for assistance to serious studies, to prayer and devotion; or even fly to business or innocent society, if solitude be in hazard of favouring the seduction. By such means you may stop the progress of the growing evil. You may apply an antidote, before the poison has had time to work its full effect.

IN the fourth place, it will be particularly useful to impress your minds with a habitual sense of the presence of the Almighty. When we reflect what a strong check the belief of divine omniscience is calculated to give to all criminal thoughts, we are tempted to suspect, that even by Christians this article of faith is not received with sincere conviction. For who but must confess, that if he knew a parent, a friend, or a neighbour, to have the power of looking into his heart, he durst not allow himself that unbounded scope which he now gives to his imagination and desire? Whence, then, comes it to pass, that

that men, without fear or concern, bring into the presence of the awful majesty of Heaven that folly and licentiousness of thought which would make them blush and tremble, if one of their own fellow-creatures could descry? At the same time, no principle is supported by clearer evidence than the omniscience of God. All religious ~~sects~~ have admitted it. All societies of men, in their oaths and covenants; appeal to it. The sovereign of the universe cannot but know what passes throughout his dominions. He who supports all nature must needs pervade and fill it. He who formed the heart is certainly conscious to what passes within it.

Never let this great article of faith escape from your view. In thinking, as well as in acting, accustom yourselves to look up with reverence to that piercing eye of divine observation which *never slumbers nor sleeps*. Behold a pen always writing over your head, and making up that great record of your thoughts, words, and actions, from which at last you are to be judged. Think that you are never less alone than when by yourselves; for then is He still with you, whose inspection is of greater consequence than that of all mankind. Let these awful considerations not only check the dissipation of corrupt fancy, but infuse into your spirits that solemn composure which is the parent of meditation and wisdom. Let them not only expel what is evil, but introduce in its stead what is pure and holy; elevating your thoughts to divine and eternal objects, and acting as the counterpoise to those attractions of the world, which would draw your whole attention downwards to sense and vanity.

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SERMON

S E R M O N XVIII.

The same Subject continued.

PROVERBS iv. 23.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are
the issues of life.*

HAVING treated, in the foregoing discourse, of the government of the thoughts, I proceed to consider the government of the passions, as the next great duty included in the *keeping of the heart*.

Passions are strong emotions of the mind, occasioned by the view of apprehended good or evil. They are original parts of the constitution of our nature; and therefore, to extirpate them is a mistaken aim. Religion requires no more of us than to moderate and rule them. When our blessed Lord assumed the nature, without the corruption of man, he was subject to like passions with us. On some occasions he felt the risings of anger. He was often touched with pity. He was grieved in spirit; he sorrowed and he wept.

Passions, when properly directed, may be subservient to very useful ends. They rouse the dormant powers of the soul. They are even found to exalt them. They often raise a man above himself, and render him more penetrating, vigorous, and masterly, than he is in his calmer hours. Actuated by some high passion, he conceives great designs, and surmounts all difficulties in the execution. He is inspired with more lofty sentiments, and endowed with more persuasive utterance, than he possesses at any other

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other time. Passions are the active forces of the soul. They are its highest powers brought into movement and exertion. But, like all other great powers, they are either useful or destructive, according to their direction and degree: as wind and fire are instrumental in carrying on many of the beneficent operations of nature; but when they rise to undue violence, or deviate from their proper course, their path is marked with ruin.

It is the present infelicity of human nature, that those strong emotions of the mind are become too powerful for the principle which ought to regulate them. This is one of the unhappy consequences of our apostacy from God, that the influence of reason is weakened, and that of passion strengthened within the heart. When man revolted from his Maker, his passions rebelled against himself; and from being originally the instruments of reason, have become the tyrants of the soul. Hence, in treating of this subject, two things may be assumed as principles: first, that through the present weakness of the understanding, our passions are often directed towards improper objects; and next, that even when their direction is just, and their objects are innocent, they perpetually tend to run into excess: they always hurry us towards their gratification with a blind and dangerous impetuosity. On these two points then turns the whole government of our passions: first, to ascertain the proper objects of their pursuit; and next, to restrain them in that pursuit when they would carry us beyond the bounds of reason. If there be any passion which intrudes itself unseasonably into our mind, which darkens and troubles our judgment, or habitually discomposes our temper; which unfits us for properly discharging the duties, or disqualifies us for cheerfully enjoying the comforts of life, we may certainly conclude it to have gained a dangerous ascendant. The great

object which we ought to purpose to ourselves is, to acquire a firm and steadfast mind, which the insatiation of passion shall not seduce, nor its violence shake; which, resting on fixed principles, shall, in the midst of contending emotions, remain free, and master of itself; able to listen calmly to the voice of conscience, and prepared to obey its dictates without hesitation.

To obtain, if possible, such command of passion, is one of the highest attainments of the rational nature. Arguments to show its importance crowd upon us from every quarter. If there be any fertile source of mischief to human life, it is, beyond doubt, the misrule of passion. It is this which poisons the enjoyment of individuals, overturns the order of society, and strews the path of life with so many miseries, as to render it indeed the valley of tears. All those great scenes of public calamity, which we behold with astonishment and horror, have originated from the source of violent passions. These have overspread the earth with bloodshed. These have pointed the assassin's dagger, and filled the poisoned bowl. These, in every age, have furnished too copious materials for the orator's pathetic declamation, and for the poet's tragical song.

When from public life we descend to private conduct, though passion operate not there in such a wide and destructive sphere, we shall find its influence to be no less baneful. I need not mention the black and fierce passions, such as envy, jealousy, and revenge, whose effects are obviously noxious, and whose agitations are immediate misery. But take any of the licentious and sensual kind. Suppose it to have unlimited scope; trace it throughout its course; and you will find that gradually, as it rises, it taints the soundness, and troubles the peace of his mind over whom it reigns; that in its progress it engages him in pursuits which are marked either
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with danger or with shame ; that in the end it wastes his fortune, destroys his health, or debases his character ; and aggravates all the miseries in which it has involved him with the concluding pangs of bitter remorse. Through all the stages of this fatal course, how many have heretofore run ? What multitudes do we daily behold pursuing it, with blind and headlong steps ?

But, on the evils which flow from unrestrained passions, it is needless to enlarge. Hardly are there any so ignorant or inconsiderate as not to admit, that where passion is allowed to reign, both happiness and virtue must suffer. I proceed therefore to what is of more consequence, to suggest some directions which may be useful in assisting us to preserve the government of our passions.

IN the first place, we must study to acquire just views of the comparative importance of those objects that are most ready to attract desire. The erroneous opinions which we form concerning happiness and misery, give rise to all the mistaken and dangerous passions which embroil our life. We suffer ourselves to be dazzled by unreal appearances of pleasure. We follow, with precipitancy, whithersoever the crowd leads. We admire, without examination, what our predecessors have admired. We fly from every shadow at which we see others tremble. Thus, agitated by vain fears and deceitful hopes, we are hurried into eager contests about objects which are in themselves of no value. By rectifying our opinions, we would strike at the root of the evil. If our vain imaginations were chastened, the tumult of our passions would subside.

It is observed, that the young and the ignorant are always the most violent in pursuit. The knowledge which is forced upon them by longer acquaintance with the world, moderates their impetuosity. Study then to anticipate, by reflexion, that knowledge which ex-

perience often purchases at too dear a price. Inure yourselves to frequent consideration of the emptiness of those pleasures which excite so much strife and commotion among mankind. Think how much more of true enjoyment is lost by the violence of passion, than by the want of those things which give occasion to that passion. Persuade yourselves that the favour of God and the possession of virtue form the chief happiness of the rational nature. Let a contented mind, and a peaceful life, hold the next place in your estimation. These are the conclusions which the wise and thinking part of mankind have always formed. To these conclusions, after having run the race of passion, you will probably come at the last. By forming them betimes, you would make a seasonable escape from that tempestuous region, through which none can pass without suffering misery, contracting guilt, and undergoing severe remorse.

In the second place, in order to attain the command of passion, it is requisite to acquire the power of self-denial. The self-denial of a Christian consists not in perpetual austerity of life, and universal renunciation of the innocent comforts of the world. Religion requires no such unnecessary sacrifices, nor is any such foe to present enjoyment. It consists in our being ready, on proper occasions, to abstain from pleasure, or to submit to suffering, for the sake of duty and conscience, or from a view to some higher and more extensive good. If we possess not this power, we shall be the prey of every loose inclination that chances to arise. Pampered by continual indulgence, all our passions will become mutinous and headstrong. Desire, not reason, will be the ruling principle of our conduct.

As, therefore, you would keep your passions within due bounds, you must betimes accustom them to know the reins. You must not wait till some critical

cal occasion for the exercise of self-denial occur. In vain you will attempt to act with authority, if your first essay be made when temptation has inflamed the mind. In cooler hours, you must sometimes abridge your enjoyment even of what is innocent. In the midst of lawful pleasure, you must maintain moderation, abstemiousness, and self-command. The observance of this discipline is the only method of supporting reason in its proper ascendant. For if you allow yourselves always to stretch to the utmost point of innocence and safety, beyond that point you will be hurried when passion shall arise in its might to shake the heart.

In the third place, impress your minds deeply with this persuasion, that nothing is what it appears to be when you are under the power of passion. Be assured, that no judgment which you can form can be in the least depended upon as sound or true. The fumes which arise from a heart boiling with violent passions, never fail to darken and trouble the understanding. When the gourd withered, under the shade of which the prophet Jonah reposed, his mind, already ruffled by the disappointment of his predictions, lost, on occasion of this slight incident, all command of itself; and in the midst of his impatience, he *wished to die rather than to live*. Instead of being calmed by that exhorting voice, *Dost thou well, O Jonah! to be angry because of the gourd?* he replied with great emotion, *I do well to be angry even unto death*. But did Jonah think so when his passion had abated? Do these sentiments bear the least resemblance to that humble and devout prayer which, on another occasion, when in his calm mind, he put up to God? No two persons can differ more from each other, than the same person differs from himself when agitated by passion, and when master of his reason. *I do well to be angry*, is the language of every man when his mind is inflamed. Every passion justifies itself. It brings in a thousand pre-

tences to its aid. It borrows many a false colour to hide its deformity. It possesses a sort of magic, by which it can magnify or diminish objects at pleasure, and transform the appearances of every thing within its sphere.

Let the knowledge of this imposture which passion practices, place you continually on your guard. Let the remembrance of it be ever at hand, to check the extravagant judgments which you are apt to pass in those moments of delusion. Listen to no suggestion which then arises. Form no conclusions on which you are to act. Assure yourselves that every thing is beheld through a false medium. Have patience for a little, and the illusion will vanish; the atmosphere will clear up around you, and objects return to be viewed in their native colours and just dimensions.

IN the fourth place, oppose early the beginnings of passion. Avoid particularly all such objects as are apt to excite passions which you know to predominate within you. As soon as you find the tempest rising, have recourse to every proper method, either of allaying its violence, or of escaping to a calmer shore. Hasten to call up emotions of an opposite nature. Study to conquer one passion by means of some other which is of less dangerous tendency. Never account any thing small or trivial which is in hazard of introducing disorder into your heart. Never make light of any desire which you feel gaining such progress as to threaten entire dominion. Blandishing it will appear at the first. As a gentle and innocent emotion, it may steal into the heart; but as it advances, is likely to pierce you through with many sorrows. What you indulged as a favourite amusement, will shortly become a serious business; and in the end may prove the burthen of your life. Most of our passions flatter us in their rise. But their beginnings are treacherous; their growth is imperceptible; and the evils which they carry in their train

train lie concealed, until their dominion is established. What Solomon says of one of them, holds true of them all, that their *beginning is as when one letteth out water*. It issues from a small chink, which once might have been easily stopped; but being neglected, it is soon widened by the stream; till the bank is at last totally thrown down, and the flood is at liberty to deluge the whole plain.

In the fifth place, the excess of every passion will be moderated by frequent meditation on the vanity of the world, the short continuance of life, the approach of death, judgment, and eternity. The imaginary degree of importance which the neglect of such meditation suffers us to bestow on temporal things, is one great cause of our vehemence in desire, and our eagerness in pursuit. We attach ourselves to the objects around us, as if we could enjoy them for ever. Higher and more enlarged prospects of the destination of man would naturally cool this misplaced ardour. For what can appear so considerable in human affairs, as to discompose or agitate the mind of him to whose view eternity lies open, and all the greatness of the universe of God? How contemptible will seem to him this hurry of spirit, this turmoil of passion, about things which are so soon to end?—Where are they who once disturbed the world with the violence of their contests, and filled it with the renown of their exploits? What now remains of their designs and enterprises, of their passions and pursuits, of their triumphs and their glory? The flood of time has passed over them, and swept them away, as if they had never been. The *fashion of the world* changes continually around us. We succeed one another in the human course, like troops of pilgrims on their journey. Absurdly we spend our time in contending about the trifles of a day, while we ought to be preparing for a higher existence. Eternity is just at hand to close this introductory scene.

It is fast rolling towards us, like the tide of a vast ocean, ready to swallow up all human concerns, and to leave no trace behind it, except the consequences of our good or bad deeds, which shall last for ever. Let such reflections allay the heart of passion. Let them reduce all human things to their proper standard. From frivolous pursuits let them recal our attention to objects of real importance; to the proper business of man; to the improvement of our nature, the discharge of our duty, the rational and religious conduct of human life.

In the last place, to our own endeavours for regulating our passions, let us join earnest prayer to God. Here, if any where, divine assistance is requisite. For such is the present blindness and imperfection of human nature, that even to discover all the disorders of our heart is become difficult; much more, to rectify them, is beyond our power. To that superior aid, then, which is promised to the pious and upright, let us look up with humble minds; beseeching the Father of mercies, that, while we study to act our own part with resolution and vigilance, he would forgive our returning weakness; would strengthen our constancy in resisting the assaults of passion; and enable us by his grace so to govern our minds, that without considerable interruptions we may proceed in a course of piety and virtue.

It now remains to treat of the government of temper, as included in the *keeping of the heart*. Passions are quick and strong emotions, which by degrees subside. Temper is the disposition which remains after these emotions are past, and which forms the habitual propensity of the soul. The one are like the stream when it is swoln by the torrent, and ruffled by the winds. The other resembles it when running within its bed, with its natural velocity and force. The influence of temper is more silent and imperceptible than that of passion. It operates with-

less violence ; but as its operation is constant, it produces effects no less considerable. It is evident, therefore, that it highly deserves to be considered in a religious view.

Many, indeed, are averse to behold it in this light. They place a good temper upon the same footing with a healthy constitution of body. They consider it as a natural felicity which some enjoy ; but for the want of which, others are not morally culpable nor accountable to God ; and hence the opinion has sometimes prevailed, that a bad temper might be consistent with a state of grace. If this were true, it would overturn that whole doctrine, of which the gospel is so full, that regeneration, or change of nature, is the essential characteristic of a Christian. It would suppose that grace might dwell amidst melevolence and rancour, and that heaven might be enjoyed by such as are strangers to charity and love.— It will readily be admitted, that some, by the original frame of their mind, are more favourably inclined than others towards certain good dispositions and habits. But this affords no justification to those who neglect to oppose the corruptions to which they are prone. Let no man imagine that the human heart is a soil altogether unsusceptible of culture ; or that the worst temper may not, through the assistance of grace, be reformed by attention and discipline. Settled depravity of temper is always owing to our own indulgence. If, in place of checking, we nourish that malignity of disposition to which we are inclined, all the consequences will be placed to our account, and every excuse from natural constitution be ejected at the tribunal of Heaven.

The proper regulation of temper affects the character of man in every relation which he bears ; and includes the whole circle of religious and moral duties. This, therefore, is a subject of too great extent to be comprehended in one discourse. But it may

may be useful to take a general view of it; and, before we conclude the doctrine of *keeping the heart*, to shew what the habitual temper of a good man ought to be, with respect to God, to his neighbour, and to himself.

FIRST, with respect to God, what he ought to cultivate is a devout temper. This imports more than the care of performing the offices of religious worship. It denotes that sensibility of heart towards the Supreme Being, which springs from a deep impression of his perfections on the soul. It stands opposed, not only to that disregard of God which forms the description of the impious, but to that absence of religious affections which sometimes prevails among those who are imperfectly good. They acknowledge, perhaps, the obligations of duty. They feel some concern to *work out their salvation*. But they apply to their duty through mere constraint; and serve God without affection or complacency. More liberal and generous sentiments animate the man who is of devout temper. God dwells upon his thoughts as a benefactor and a father, to whose voice he hearkens with joy. Amidst the occurrences of life, his mind naturally opens to the admiration of his wisdom, the reverence of his power, the love of his transcendent goodness. All nature appears to his view as stamped with the impress of these perfections. Habitual gratitude to his Maker for mercies past, and cheerful resignation to his will in all time to come, are the native effusions of his heart.

Such a temper as this deserves to be cultivated with the utmost attention; for it contributes in a high degree, both to our improvement and our happiness. It refines, and it exalts human nature. It softens that hardness which our hearts are ready to contract from frequent intercourse with this rugged world. It facilitates the discharge of every duty towards God and man. At the same time it is a
temper

temper peaceful and serene, elevated and rejoicing. It forms the current of our affections to flow in a placid tenour. It opens pleasing prospects to the mind. It banishes harsh and bitter passions; and places us above the reach of many of the annoyances of worldly life. When the temper is truly devout, *the peace of God which passeth understanding keepeth the heart and soul.* I proceed,

SECONDLY, to point out the proper state of our temper with respect to one another. It is evident, in the general, that if we consult either public welfare or private happiness, Christian charity ought to regulate our disposition in mutual intercourse. But as this great principle admits of several diversified appearances, let us consider some of the chief forms under which it ought to show itself in the usual tenour of life. Universal benevolence to mankind, when it rests in the abstract, is a loose indeterminate idea, rather than a principle of real effect; and too often floats as an useless speculation in the head, instead of affecting the temper and the heart.

What, first, presents itself to be recommended is a peaceable temper; a disposition averse to give offence, and desirous of cultivating harmony, and amiable intercourse in society. This supposes yielding and condescending manners, unwillingness to contend with others about trifles, and, in contests that are unavoidable, proper moderation of spirit. Such a temper is the first principle of self-enjoyment. It is the basis of all order and happiness among mankind. The positive and contentious, the rude and quarrellsome, are the bane of society. They seem destined to blast the small share of comfort which nature has here allotted to man. But they cannot disturb the peace of others, more than they break their own. The hurricane rages first in their own bosom, before it is let forth upon the world.

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In the tempests which they raise, they are always lost; and frequently it is their lot to perish.

A peaceable temper must be supported by a candid one, or a disposition to view the conduct of others with fairness and impartiality. This stands opposed to a jealous and suspicious temper, which ascribes every action to the worst motive, and throws a black shade over every character. As you would be happy in yourselves, or in your connections with others, guard against this malignant spirit. Study that charity *which thinketh no evil*; that temper which, without degeneration into credulity, will dispose you to be just; and which can allow you to observe an error, without imputing it as a crime. Thus you will be kept free from that continual irritation which imaginary injuries raise in a suspicious breast; and will walk among men as your brethren, not your enemies.

But to be peaceable, and to be candid, is not all that is required of a good man. He must cultivate a kind, generous, and sympathizing temper, which feels for distress, wherever it is beheld; which enters into the concerns of his friends with ardour; and to all with whom he has intercourse is gentle, obliging, and humane. How amiable appears such a disposition, when contrasted with a malicious or envious temper, which wraps itself up in its own narrow interests, looks with an evil eye on the success of others, and with an unnatural satisfaction feeds on their disappointment or miseries! How little does he know of the true happiness of life, who is a stranger to that intercourse of good offices and kind affections, which, by a pleasing charm, attach men to one another, and circulate joy from heart to heart!

You are not to imagine that a benevolent temper finds no exercise, unless when opportunities offer of performing actions of high generosity, or of extensive

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five utility. These may seldom occur. The condition of the greater part of mankind, in a good measure, precludes them. But in the ordinary round of human affairs, a thousand occasions daily present themselves of mitigating the vexations which others suffer, of soothing their minds, of aiding their interests, of promoting their cheerfulness, or ease. Such occasions may relate to the smaller incidents of life. But let us remember that of small incidents the system of human life is chiefly composed. The attentions which respect these when suggested by real benignity of temper, are often more material to the happiness of those around us, than actions which carry the appearance of greater dignity and splendour. No wise or good man ought to account any rules of behaviour as below his regard, which tend to cement the great brotherhood of mankind in comfortable union.

Particularly in the course of that familiar intercourse which belongs to domestic life, all the virtues of temper find an ample range. It is very unfortunate, that within that circle, men too often think themselves at liberty to give unrestrained vent to the caprice of passion and humour. Whereas there, on the contrary, more than any where, it concerns them to attend to the government of their heart; to check what is violent in their tempers, and to soften what is harsh in their manners. For there the temper is formed. There, the real character displays itself. The forms of the world disguise men when abroad. But within his own family, every man is known to be what he truly is.—In all our intercourse, then, with others, particularly in that which is closest and most intimate, let us cultivate a peaceable, a candid, a gentle and friendly temper. This is the temper to which, by repeated injunctions, our holy religion seeks to form us. This was the temper of Christ. This is the temper of Heaven.

WE are now to consider, thirdly, the proper state of temper, as it respects the individual himself. The basis of all the good dispositions which belong to this head, is humility. By this I understand, not that meanness of spirit which leads a man to undervalue himself, and to sink below his rank and character; but what the scripture expresses with great propriety, when it exhorts *every man, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly*. He who adopts all the flattering suggestions of self-love, and forms claims upon the world proportioned to the imaginary opinion which he has conceived of his merit, is preparing for himself a thousand mortifications. Whereas by checking the risings of ill-founded vanity, and retreating within those bounds which a moderate estimation of our character prescribes, we escape the miseries which always pursue an arrogant mind, and recommend ourselves to the favour both of God and man.

Hence will naturally arise a contented temper, which is one of the greatest blessings that can be enjoyed by man, and one of the most material requisites to the proper discharge of the duties of every station. For a fretful and discontented temper renders one incapable of performing aright any part in life. It is unthankful and impious towards God; and towards men, provoking and unjust. It is a gangrene which preys on the vitals, and infects the whole constitution with disease and putrefaction. Subdue pride and vanity, and you will take the most effectual method of eradicating this distemper. You will no longer behold the objects around you with jaundiced eyes. You will take in good part the blessings which Providence is pleased to bestow, and the degree of favour which your fellow-creatures are disposed to grant you. Viewing yourselves, with all your imperfections and failings, in a just light, you will rather be surprised at your enjoying

so many good things, than discontented because there are any which you want.

From a humble and contented temper will spring a cheerful one. This, if not in itself a virtue, is at least the garb in which virtue should be always arrayed. Piety and goodness ought never to be marked with that dejection which sometimes takes rise from superstition, but which is the proper portion only of guilt. At the same time, the cheerfulness belonging to virtue is to be carefully distinguished from that light and giddy temper which characterizes folly, and is so often found among the dissipated and vicious part of mankind. Their gaiety is owing to a total want of reflexion; and brings with it the usual consequences of an unthinking habit, shame, remorse, and heaviness of heart, in the end. The cheerfulness of a well-regulated mind, springs from a good conscience and the favour of heaven, and is bounded by temperance and reason. It makes a man happy in himself, and promotes the happiness of all around him. It is the clear and calm sunshine of a mind illuminated by piety and virtue. It crowns all other good dispositions, and comprehends the general effect which they ought to produce on the heart.

SUCH, on the whole, is the temper, or habitual frame of mind, in a good man: Devout towards God; towards men; peaceable, candid, affectionate and humane; with himself, humble, contented and cheerful. To the establishment of this happy temper all the directions which I before suggested for the due regulation of the thoughts, and for the government of the passions, naturally conduce; in this they ought to issue; and when this temper is thoroughly formed within us, then may the heart be esteemed to have been kept with all diligence. That we may be thus enabled to keep it, for the sake both of present enjoyment and of preparation for greater happiness, let us earnestly pray to Heaven. A greater blessing

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we cannot implore of the Almighty, than that he who made the human heart, and who knows its frailties, would assist us to subject it to that discipline which religion requires, which reason approves, but which his grace alone can enable us to maintain.

S E R M O N XIX.

JAMES i. 17.

Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

THE divine nature, in some views, attracts our love; in others, commands our reverence; in all, is intitled to the highest attention from the human mind. We never elevate our thoughts, in a proper manner towards the Supreme Being, without returning to our own sphere with sentiments more improved; and if, at any time, his greatness oppresses our thoughts, his moral perfections always afford us relief. His almighty power, his infinite wisdom and supreme goodness, are sounds familiar to our ears. In his immutability we are less accustomed to consider him; and yet it is this perfection which, perhaps, more than any other distinguishes the divine nature from the human; gives complete energy to all its other attributes, and entitles it to the highest adoration. For hence are derived the regular order of nature and the steadfastness of the universe. Hence flows the unchanging tenour of those laws which, from age to age, regulate the conduct of mankind. Hence the uniformity of that government, and the certainty of those promises, which are the ground of our

our trust and security. Goodness could produce no more than feeble and wavering hopes, and power would command very imperfect reverence, if we were left to suspect that the plans which goodness had framed might alter, or that the power of carrying them into execution might decrease. The contemplation of God, therefore, as unchangeable is his nature and in all his perfections, must undoubtedly be fruitful both of instruction and of consolation to man. I shall, first, endeavour to illustrate in some degree the nature of the divine immutability; and then make application of it to our own conduct.

EVERY good and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of Lights. The title which in the text is given to the Deity, carries an elegant allusion to the Sun, the source of light, the most universal benefactor of nature, the most regular and constant of all the great bodies with which we are acquainted in the universe. Yet even with the Sun there are certain degrees of *variableness*. He apparently rises and sets; he seems to approach nearer to us in summer, and to retire farther off in winter; his influence is varied by the seasons, and his lustre is affected by the clouds. Whereas with him who is the *Father of Lights*, of whose everlasting brightness the glory of the Sun is but a faint image, there is no *shadow of turning*, not the most distant approach to change. In his being or essence it is plain that alteration can never take place. For as his existence is derived from no prior cause, nor dependent on any thing without himself, his nature can be influenced by no power, can be affected by no accident, can be impaired by no time. From everlasting to everlasting, he continues the same. Hence it is said, that *he only hath immortality*; that is, he possesses it in a manner incommunicable to all other beings. Eternity is described as the *high and holy place in which he dwelleth*; it is a habitation in which none but the

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Father of Lights can enter. The name which he taketh to himself is, *I am*. Of other things, some have been and others shall be; but this is he *which is, which was, and which is to come*. All time is his; it is measured out by him in limited portions to the various orders of created beings; but his own existence fills equally every point of duration; *the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*.

As in his essence, so in his attributes and perfections, it is impossible there can be any change. To imperfect natures only it belongs to improve and to decay. Every alteration which they undergo in their abilities or dispositions, flows either from internal defect, or from the influence of a superior cause. But as no higher cause can bring from without any accession to the divine nature, so within itself it contains no principle of decay. For the same reason that the self-existent Being was from the beginning powerful and wise, just and good, he must continue unalterably so for ever. Hence with much propriety the divine perfections are described in scripture by allusions to those objects to which we ascribe the most permanent stability. *His righteousness is like the strong mountains. His mercy is in the heavens; and his faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds*. These perfections of the divine nature differ widely from the human virtues, which are their faint shadows. The justice of men is at one time severe, at another time relenting; their goodness is sometimes confined to a partial fondness for a few, sometimes runs out into a blind indulgence towards all. But goodness and justice are in the Supreme Being calm and steady principles of action, which, enlightened by perfect wisdom, and never either warped by partiality, or disturbed by passion, persevere in one regular and constant tenor. Among men they may sometimes break forth with transient splendour, like those

those wandering fires which illuminate for a little the darkness of the night. But in God they shine with that uniform brightness, which we can liken to nothing so much as to the untroubled, eternal lustre of the highest heavens.

From this follows, what is chiefly material for us to attend to, that in the course of his operations towards mankind, in his counsels and decrees, in his laws, his promises, and his threatenings, there is *no variableness nor shadow of turning with the Almighty. Known to him from the beginning were all his works.* In the divine idea the whole system of nature existed, long before the foundations of the earth were laid. When he said, *Let there be light*, he only realized the great plan which from everlasting he had formed in his own mind. Foreseen by him was every revolution which the course of ages was to produce. Whatever the counsels of men can effect was comprehended in his decree. No new emergency can arise to surprise him. No agitations of anger or of sorrow, of fear or of hope, can shake his mind or influence his conduct. He rests in the eternal possession of that supreme beatitude, which neither the virtues nor the crimes of men can in the least affect. From a motive of overflowing goodness, he reared up the universe. As the eternal lover of righteousness, he rules it. The whole system of his government is fixed; his laws are irrevocable; and what he once loveth, *he loveth to the end.* In scripture, indeed, he is sometimes said to be grieved and to repent. But such expressions, it is obvious, are employed from accommodation to common conception; in the same manner as when bodily organs are in other passages ascribed to God. The scripture, as a rule of life addressed to the multitude, must make use of the language of men. The divine nature, represented in its native sublimity, would have transcended all human conception. When, upon the reformation of sinners,

God

God is said to *repent of the evil* which he had threatened against them, this intimates no more, that he suits his dispensations to the alterations which take place in the characters of men. His disposition towards good and evil continues the same, but varies in its application as its objects vary; just as the laws themselves, which are capable of no change of affection, brings rewards or punishments at different times to the same person, according as his behaviour alters. Immutability is indeed so closely connected with the notion of supreme perfection, that wherever any rational conceptions of a Deity have taken place, this attribute has been ascribed to him. Reason taught the wise and reflecting in every age to believe, that, as what is eternal cannot die, so what is perfect can never vary, and that the great Governor of the universe could be no other than an unchangeable Being.

FROM the contemplation of this obvious, but fundamental truth, let us proceed to the practical improvement of it. Let us consider what effect the serious consideration of it ought to produce on our mind and behaviour.

It will be proper to begin this head of discourse by removing an objection which the doctrine I have illustrated may appear to form against religious services, and in particular against the duty of prayer. To what purpose, it may be urged, is homage addressed to a Being whose purpose is unalterably fixed; to whom *our righteousness extendeth not*; whom by no arguments we can persuade, and by no supplications we can mollify? The objection would have weight if our religious addresses were designed to work any alteration on God; either by giving him information of what he did not know; or by exciting affections which he did not possess; or by inducing him to change measures which he had previously formed. But they are only crude and imper-

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fect notions of religion which can suggest such ideas. The change which our devotions are intended to make is upon ourselves, not upon the Almighty. Their chief efficacy is derived from the good dispositions which they raise and cherish in the human soul. By pouring out pious sentiments and desires before God, by adoring his perfection and confessing our own unworthiness, by expressing our dependence on his aid, our gratitude for his past favours, our submission to his present will, our trust in his future mercy, we cultivate such affections as suit our place and station in the universe, and are thereby prepared for becoming objects of the divine grace. Accordingly frequent assurances are given us in Scripture, that the prayers of sincere worshippers, preferred through the great Mediator, shall be productive of the happiest effects. *When they ask, they shall receive; when they seek, they shall find; when they knock, it shall be opened to them.* Prayer is appointed to be the channel for conveying the divine grace to mankind, because the wisdom of Heaven saw it to be one of the most powerful means of improving the human heart.

When religious homage is considered in this light, as a great instrument of spiritual and moral improvement, all the objections which scepticism can form from the divine immutability, conclude with no more force against prayer, than against every other mean of improvement which reason has suggested to man. If prayer be superfluous because God is unchangeable, we might upon similar grounds conclude, that it is needless to labour the earth, to nourish our bodies, or to cultivate our minds, because the fertility of the ground, the continuance of our life, and the degree of our understanding, depend upon an immutable Sovereign, and were from all eternity fore-seen by him. Such absurd conclusions reason has ever repudiated. To every plain and sound understanding

it has clearly dictated, that to explore the unknown purposes of Heaven belongs not to us ; but that He who decrees the end, certainly requires the means ; and that in the diligent employment of the means which can advance either our temporal or spiritual felicity, the chief exertions of human wisdom and human duty consist. Assuming it then for an undoubted principle, that religion is a reasonable service, and that, though with the *Father of Lights* there be *no variableness*, the homage of his creatures is nevertheless for the wisest reasons required by him, I proceed to show what sentiments the contemplation of divine immutability should raise in our minds, and what duties it should chiefly enforce.

I. LET it excite us to admire and adore. Filled with profound reverence, let us look up to that Supreme Being who sits for everlasting on the throne of the universe ; moving all things, but remaining immoveable himself ; directing every revolution of the creation, but affected by no revolutions of events or of time. He beholds the heavens and the earth *run as old as a garment, and decay like a vesture*. At their appointed periods he raises up, or he dissolves worlds. But amidst all the convulsions of changing and perishing nature, his glory and felicity remain unaltered.—The view of great and stupendous objects in the natural world strikes the mind with solemn awe. What veneration, then, ought to be inspired by the contemplation of an object so sublime as the eternal and unchangeable ruler of the universe ! The composure and stillness of thought introduced by such a meditation has a powerful tendency both to purify and to elevate the heart. It effaces, for a time, those trivial ideas, and extinguishes those low passions, which arise from the circle of vain and passing objects around us. It opens the mind to all the sentiments of devotion ; and accompanies devotion with that profound reverence which guards it from

from every improper excess. When we consider the Supreme Being as employed in works of love; when we think of his condescension to the human race in sending his Son to dwell on the earth; encouraged by favours and warmed by gratitude, we are sometimes in danger of presuming too much on his goodness, and of indulging a certain fondness of affection, which is unsuitable to our humble and dependent state. It is necessary that He should frequently appear to our minds in all that majesty with which the immutability of his nature clothes him; in order that reverence may be combined with love, and that a mixture of sacred awe may chasten the rapturous effusions of warm devotion. Servile fear, indeed, would crush the spirit of ingenuous and affectionate homage. But that reverence which springs from elevated conceptions of the divine nature, has a happy effect in checking the forwardness of imagination, restraining our affections within due bounds, and composing our thoughts at the same time that it exalts them.

When from the adoration of the unchangeable perfection of the Almighty, we return to the view of our own state, the first sentiment which ought naturally to arise, is that of self-abasement. We are too apt to be lifted up by any little distinctions which we possess; and to fancy ourselves great, only because there are others whom we consider as less. But what is man with all his advantages and boasted powers before the eternal *Father of Lights*? With God there is no variableness; with man there is no stability. Virtue and vice divide the empire of his mind; and wisdom and folly alternately rule him. Hence he is changeable in his designs, fickle in his friendships, fluctuating in his whole character. His life is a series of contradictions. He is one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; sometimes obliged by experience to alter his purpose, and often led to change

it through levity. Variable and unequal himself, he is surrounded with fleeting objects. He is placed as in the midst of a torrent, where all things are rolling by and nothing keeps its place. He has hardly time to contemplate this scene of vicissitude, before he too is swept away.—Thus circumstanced in himself, and in all the objects with which he is connected, let him be admonished to be humble and modest. Let the contemplation of the unchanging glory of his Creator inspire him with sentiments of due submission. Let it teach him to know his proper place; and check that vanity which is so ready to betray him into guilt.

Let the same meditation affect him with a deep sense of what he owes to the goodness of the Deity. His goodness never appears in so striking a light, as when viewed in connexion with his greatness. The description which is given of him in the text calls, in this view, for our particular attention. It presents to us the most amiable union of condescension with majesty, of the moral with the natural perfections of God, which can possibly be exhibited to the imagination of man. *From the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, cometh down every good and perfect gift.* The most independent of all Beings is represented as the most beneficent. He who is eternal and immutable, exalted above all, and incapable of receiving returns from any, is the liberal and unwearied Giver of every thing that is good.—Let such views of the divine nature not only call forth gratitude and praise, but prompt us to imitate what we adore. Let them shew us that benevolence is divine; that to stoop from our fancied grandeur in order to assist and relieve one another, is so far from being any degradation of character, that it is our truest honour, and our nearest resemblance to the Father of Lights.

II. LET the consideration of the divine immutability

bility convince us, that the method of attaining the favour of Heaven is one and invariable. Were the Almighty a capricious and inconstant Being, like man, we should be at a loss what tenour of conduct to hold. In order to conciliate his grace, we might think of applying sometimes to one supposed principle of his inclination, sometimes to another; and bewildered amidst various attempts, would be overwhelmed with dismay. The guilty would essay to flatter him. The timid, sometimes by austere mortifications, sometimes by costly gifts, sometimes by obsequious rites, would try to appease him. Hence, in fact, have arisen all the corruptions of religious worship among men; from their forming the divine character upon their own, and ascribing to the Sovereign of the Universe the mutability of human passions. God is represented by the psalmist David as saying to be wicked, *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as myself.* This continues to be the description of all the superstitious and enthusiastic sects which, since the days of David, have sprung up in the world.

It is our peculiar happiness under the gospel to have God revealed to us in his genuine character, as *without variableness or shadow of turning.* We know that at no time there is any change, either in his affections, or in the plan of his administration. One light always shines upon us from above. One clear and direct path is always pointed out to man. The Supreme Being is, and was, and ever will be, the supporter of order and virtue; *the righteous Lord loving righteousness.* The external forms of religion may vary; but under all dispensations which proceed from God, its substance is the same. It tends continually to one point, the purification of man's heart and life. This was the object of the original law of nature. This was the scope of the Mosaic institution amidst all its sacrifices and rites; and this is unquestionably the end of the gospel. Son invariable

bly constant is God to this purpose, that the dispensation of mercy in Christ Jesus, which admits of the vicarious atonement and righteousness of a Redeemer, makes no change in our obligation to fulfill the duties of a good life. The Redeemer himself hath taught us, that to the end of time the moral law continues in its full force; and that *til heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from it.* This is the only institution known to men, whose authority is unchanging and constant. Human laws arise and fall with the empires that gave them birth. Systems of philosophy vary with the progress of knowledge and light. Manners, sentiments, and opinions, alter with the course of time. But throughout all ages, and amidst all revolutions, the rule of moral and religious conduct is the same. It partakes of that immutability of the divine nature, on which it is founded. Such as it was delivered to the first worshippers of God, it continues to be, at this day, to us; and such it shall remain to our posterity for ever.

III. LET the contemplation of this perfection of the divine nature teach us to imitate, as far as our frailty will permit, that constancy and steadfastness which we adore. All the moral attributes of the Supreme Being, are standards of character towards which we ought to aspire. But as in all these perfections there are properties peculiar to the divine nature, our endeavours to resemble them are laid under great restrictions by the dissimilarity between our nature and the divine. With respect to that attribute which we now consider, the circumstances are evident which preclude improper imitation. To man it is frequently necessary to correct his errors, and to change his conduct. An attempt, therefore, to continue wholly invariable would, in our situation, be no other than imprudent and criminal obstinacy. But withal, the immutable rectitude of the
Deity

Deity should lead us to aspire after fixedness of principle and uniformity of conduct, as the glory of the rational nature. Impressed with the sense of that supreme excellence which results from unchanging goodness, faithfulness and truth, let us become ashamed of that levity which degrades the human character. Let us *ponder our paths*, act upon a well-regulated plan, and remain consistent with ourselves. Contemplating the glory of the Father of Lights, let us aim at being transformed, in some degree, *into the same image from glory to glory*. Finally.

IV. LET the divine immutability become the ground of confidence and trust to good men, amidst all the revolutions of this uncertain world. This is one of the chief improvements to be made of the subject and therefore requires full illustration. There are three lights in which we may view the benefit rebounding to us from that attribute of God which we now consider. It assures us of the constancy of nature; of the regular administration of Providence; of the certain accomplishment of all the divine promises.

First, it gives us ground to depend on the constant and uniform course of nature. On the unchangeableness of God rests the stability of the universe. What we call the laws of nature are no other than the decrees of the Supreme Being. It is because He is *without variableness or shadow of turning* that those laws have continued the same since the beginning of the world; that the Sun so constantly observes his time of rising and going down; that the seasons annually return; the tides periodically ebb and flow; the earth yields its fruits at stated intervals; and the human body and mental powers advance to maturity by a regular progress. In all those motions and operations which are incessantly going on throughout nature, there is no stop nor interruption; no change nor innovation; no defection from their

main scope. The same powerful and steady hand which gave the first impulse to the powers of nature, restrains them from ever exceeding their prescribed line. Hence arises the chief comfort of our present life. We find ourselves in a regular and orderly world. We look forward to a known succession of events. We are enabled to form plans of action. From the cause we calculate the effect; and from the past, we reason with confidence concerning the future.

Accustomed from our infancy to this constancy in nature, we are hardly sensible of the blessing. Familiarity has the same effect here, as in many other enjoyments, to efface gratitude. But let us, for a moment, take an opposite view of things. Let us suppose, that we had any cause to dread capriciousness or change in the power who rules the course of nature; any ground to suspect that, but for one day, the Sun might not rise, nor the current of the waters hold their usual course, nor the laws of motion and and vegetation proceed as we have been accustomed to behold them. What dismay would instantly fill all hearts! what horror would seem to overspread the whole face of Nature! What part could we act, or whither could we run, in the midst of convulsions which overturned all the measures we had formed for happiness, or for safety? The present abode of man would then become, as Job describes the region of the grave, *a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and the shadow of death; without any order; and where the light is as darkness.* With what joy ought we then to recognize an unvarying and steadfast ruler, under whose dominion we have no such disasters to dread; but can depend on the course of Nature continuing to proceed as it has ever gone on, until the period shall arrive of its final dissolution!

But though the great laws of Nature be constant like

like their Author, yet in the affairs of men there is much variety and change. All that regards our present possessions and enjoyments was, for wise reasons, left, in a great measure, uncertain; and from this uncertainty arises the distress of human life. Sensible of the changes to which we lie open, we look round with anxious eyes, and eagerly grasp at every object which appears to promise us security. But in vain is the whole circle of human things explored with this view. There is nothing on earth so stable as to assure us of undisturbed rest, nor so powerful as to afford us constant protection. Time, death, and change, triumph over all the labours of men. What we build up, they incessantly destroy. The public condition of nations, and the private fortunes of individuals, are alike subject to reverse. Life never retains long the same form. Its whole scenery is continually shifting around us.——Amidst those endless vicissitudes, what can give any firm consolation, any satisfying rest to the heart, except the dominion of a wise and righteous sovereign, *with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning?* Though all things change, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as there is fixed and permanent goodness at the head of the universe, we are assured that the great interests of all good men shall be safe. *That river perpetually flows, the streams whereof make glad the city of God.* We know that the Supreme Being loved righteousness from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to love it to the last. Under his government none of those revolutions happen which have place among the kingdoms of the earth, where princes die and new sovereigns ascend the throne; new ministers and new counsels succeed; the whole face of affairs is changed; and former plans fall into oblivion. *But the throne of the Lord is established for ever; and the thoughts of his heart*

endure to all generations. We serve the same God whom our fathers worshipped, and whom our posterity shall adore. His unchanging dominion comprehends all events and all ages; establishes a connecting principle which holds together the past, the present, and the future; gives stability to things which in themselves are fluctuating, and extracts order from those which appear most confused. Well may the earth rejoice, and the multitude of isles be glad, because their reigneth over the universe such an immutable Lord.

Were you to unhinge this great article of faith; were you either to say with the fool, that there is no God, or to suppose with the superstitious, that the God who rules is variable and capricious; you would indeed lay the axe to the root of the tree, and cut down, with one blow, the hope and security of mankind. For you would then leave nothing in the whole compass of nature, but a round and casual and transitory being; no foundation of trust, no protection to the righteous, no steadfast principle to uphold and to regulate the succession of existence. Instead of that magnificent spectacle which the world now exhibits, when beheld in connexion with the divine government, it would then only present to view, a multitude of short-lived creatures springing out of the dust, wandering on the face of the earth without guide or protector, struggling for a few years against the torrent of uncertainty and change; and then sinking into utter oblivion, and vanishing like visions of the night. Mysterious obscurity would involve the beginning of things; disorder would mark their progress; and the blackness of darkness would cover their final result. Whereas, when Faith enables us to discover an universal Sovereign, whose power never fails, and whose wisdom and goodness never change, the prospect clears up on every side. A ray from the great source of light seems to illuminate the whole creation.

creation. Good men discover a parent and a friend. They attain a fortress in every danger ; a refuge amidst all storms, a dwelling-place in all generations. They are no longer afraid of evil tidings. *Their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.*

THOUGH these reasonings from the unchanging tenour of Divine government cannot but afford much comfort to good men, their satisfaction, however, becomes still more complete, when they consider the explicit promises which are given them in the world of God. The immutability of the divine purpose assures them most perfectly of those promises being fulfilled in due time, how adverse soever circumstances may at present appear to their accomplishment. *The strength of Israel is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said it, and shall he not do it ? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ?* Men have the command only of the present time. When that is suffered to pass, changes may befall, either in their own state, or in the situation of things around them, which shall defeat their best intentions in our behalf, and render all their promises fruitless. Hence, even setting aside the danger of human inconstancy, the confidence which we can repose on any earthly protector is extremely imperfect. Man, in his highest glory, is but a reed floating on the stream of time, and forced to follow every new direction of the current. But God is *the rock of ages*. All time is equally in his hands. Intervening accidents cannot embarrass ; him nor any unforeseen obstacle retard the performance of his most distant promise. *One day is with the Lord as a thousand years ; and a thousand years are as one day.* There is no vicissitude of the human state in which good men cannot take sanctuary with him as a sure and abiding friend ; the safe conductor of their pilgrimage here, as well as the eternal rest of their souls hereafter. All their patrons may desert them ; and all their

friends may die : but the Lord still lives, who is their rock; and the most high God, who is their redeemer. He hath promised that he will not leave them when they are old, nor forsake them when their strength faileth; and that even when their heart shall faint, and their flesh fail, he will be the strength of their heart and their portion for ever. His immutability is not only the ground of trust in him during their own abode on earth, but gives them the satisfaction of looking forward to the same wise and good administration as continued to the end of time. When departing hence, and bidding adieu to life, with all its changeful scenes, they can with comfort and peace leave their family, their friends, and their dearest concerns, in the hands of that God who reigneth for ever; and whose countenance shall always behold the upright with the same complacency. *My days are like a shadow that inclineth, and I am withered like the grass. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance to all generations. The children of thy servants shall continue; and their seed shall be established before thee.*

SUCH are the benefits which good men may derive from meditation on God as *without variableness or shadow of turning*. It inspires them with sentiments of devout, humble, and grateful adoration. It points out to them the unvarying tenour of conduct which they ought to hold; checks their fickleness and inconstancy, and amidst all distresses and fears affords them comfort. The immutability of God is the surest basis on which their hopes can be built. It is indeed the pillar on which the whole universe rests.—On such serious and solemn meditations let our thoughts often dwell, in order to correct that folly and levity which are so apt to take possession of the human heart. And if our minds be overawed, and even depressed, with so high a view of the divine nature, let them be relieved by the reflection, that to this unchangeable God we are permitted

ted to look up through a gracious Mediator, who, though possessed of divine perfection, is not unconscious of human distress and frailty.

S E R M O N XX.

Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

H E B R E W S iv. 15.

We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

WHEN we compare the counsels of Providence with the plans of men, we find a like difference obtain as in the works of nature compared with those of art. The works of art may, at first view, appear the most finished and beautiful; but when the eyes is assisted to pry into their contexture, the nicest workmanship is discerned to be rough and blemished. Whereas the works of nature gain by the most accurate examination; and those which on a superficial survey appeared defective or rude, the more intimately they are inspected, discover the more exact construction and consummate beauty. In the same manner the systems of worldly policy, though at first they seem plausible and profound, soon betray in their progress the narrowness of the human understanding; while those dispensations of Providence which appeared to furnish objections either against the goodness or the wisdom of Heaven, have, upon a more extensive view of their consequences, frequently afforded the most striking proofs of both.

God

God manifested in the flesh was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. It contradicted every profession which their confined ideas of religion and philosophy led them to entertain. If a superiour Being was to interpose for the restoration of a degenerate world, they concluded that he would certainly appear in celestial majesty. But the thoughts of God are not as the thoughts of men. The divine wisdom saw it to be fit that the Saviour of mankind should in all things be made like unto those whom he came to save. By living as a man among men, he dispensed instruction in the most winning manner. He added to instruction the grace and the force of his own example. He accommodated that example to the most trying and difficult situations of human life; and by suffering a painful death, he both taught men how to suffer and die, and in that nature which had offended he offered a solemn expiation to God for human guilt.

Besides these ends, so worthy of God, which were accomplished by the incarnation of Christ, another, of high importance, is suggested in the text. Human life is to good men, as well as to others, a state of suffering and distress. To supply them with proper consolation and encouragement during such a state, was one great purpose of the undertaking of Christ. With this view he assumed the office of their high priest, or mediator with God; and the encouragement which this office affords them; will be proportioned to their assured belief, first of his power, and next of his compassion. His power is set forth in the verse preceding the text, and the proper argument is founded upon it. *Seeing that we have a great high priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.* But though it be encouraging to know that our high priest is the Son of God, and that he is passed into the heavens, yet these facts alone are not sufficient to

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render him the full object of our confidence. For, as the Apostle afterwards observes, it belongs to the character of a high priest *to be taken from among men, that he may have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, seeing that he himself is compassed with infirmity.* In order then to satisfy us of our high priest's possessing also the qualifications of mercy and compassion, we are told that he is *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are.* The force of this consideration I purpose now to illustrate. I shall first explain the facts which are stated in the text, and then show how from these our Saviour's compassion is to be inferred, and in what manner it may be accommodated to the consolation and hope of good men amidst various exigencies of life.

THE assertion in the text of Christ's being *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*, plainly implies that he had full experience both of the external distresses, and of the internal sorrows of human nature. Assuming a body such as ours, he subjected himself to all the natural consequences of corporal frailty. He did not chuse for himself an easy and opulent condition, in order to glide through the world with the least molestation. He did not suit his mission to the upper ranks of mankind chiefly, by assimilating his state to theirs. But, born in meanness, and bred up to labour, he submitted to the inconveniencies of that poor and toilsome life which falls to the share of the most numerous part of the human race. Whatever is severe in the disregard of relations or the ingratitude of friends, in the scorn of the proud or the insults of the mean, in the virulence of reproach or the sharpness of pain, was undergone by Christ. Though his life was short, he familiarized himself in it with a wide compass to human woe; and there is almost no distressful situation to which we can be reduced, but what he has experienced before

fore us. There is not the least reason to imagine that the eminence of his nature raise him above the sensations of trouble and grief. Had this been the case, he would have been a sufferer in appearance only, not in reality; there would have been no merit in his patience, or in the resignation which he expressed. On the contrary, it appears from many circumstances, that the sensibility of his nature was tender and exquisite. He affected none of that hard indifference in which some ancient philosophers vainly gloried. He felt as a man, and he sympathized with the feelings of others. On different occasions we are informed that he *was troubled in spirit*, that *he groaned*, and that *he wept*. The relation of his agony in the garden of Gethsemane exhibits a striking picture of the sensations of innocent nature oppressed with anguish. It discovers all the conflict between the dread of suffering on the one hand, and the sense of duty on the other; the man struggling for a while with human weakness, and in the end recollected in virtue, and rising superiour to the objects of dismay which were then in his view. *Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. Thy will be done.* Thus was our Saviour touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

It is added in the text, that he was *in all points tempted like as we are*. To be tempted is, in the language of Scripture, to undergo such trials of virtue as are accompanied with difficulty and conflict. Though our Lord was not liable to any temptations from depravity of nature, yet he was perpetually exposed to such as arise from situations the most adverse to virtue. His whole life was in this respect a course of temptation; that is, a severe trial of his constancy by every discouragement. He suffered repeated provocations both from friends and foes.

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His endeavours to do good were requited with the most obstinate and perverse opposition. Sometimes by the solicitations of ignorant multitudes he was tempted to accept the proffers of worldly greatness. Often, by the insults of multitudes, more blind and brutal, he was tempted to desert an office which exposed him to so much misery. Together with the world, the powers of darkness also combined their efforts against him. We are informed that he was *led into the wilderness*, and amidst the horrors of a wild and dreary solitude, was *tempted of the devil*. The great adversary of mankind seems to have been permitted to exert unusual proofs of his power and malice, on purpose that the trial of our Saviour's constancy might be more complete and his victory over him more illustrious and distinguished.

From all these circumstances, the conclusion is obvious, that our Lord knows from personal experience, all the discouragements and temptations which virtue can suffer. Though he participated not of the corruption, yet he felt the weakness of human nature. He felt the strength of passion. He is no stranger to the disturbance and commotion which either the attacks of the world, or the powers of darkness, are able to raise within the breast of man. One remarkable difference, indeed, takes place between our temptations and those of Christ. Though he was *tempted like as we are, yet it was without sin*. Though the conflict was the same, the issue was different. We are often foiled; He always overcame. But his disconformity to us in this respect is far from weakening the strength of our present argument. For sin contracts and hardens the heart. Every degree of guilt incurred by yielding to temptation tends to debase the mind, and to weaken the generous and benevolent principles in human nature. If from our Lord's being *tempted like as we are*, we have any ground to expect his sympathy, from his being tempt-
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ed, yet without sin, we are entitled to hope that his sympathy, unallayed and perfect, will operate with more complete energy.

FROM this view of the facts which are stated in the text. I proceed to show how justly we may infer our Saviour's compassion, and in what manner it is to be accommodated to the consolation of good men amidst various exigences of life.

It has been the universal opinion of mankind, that personal experience of suffering humanizes the heart. In the school of affliction, compassion is always supposed to be most thoroughly learned: and hence in the laws of Moses, when the Israelites are commanded not to oppress the stranger, this reason is given, *for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers yourselves in the land of Egypt.* The distressed, accordingly, flee for consolation to those who have been their companions in woe. They decline the prosperous, and look up to them with a suspicious eye. They consider them as ignorant of their feelings, and therefore regardless of their complaints. Amidst the manifold sorrows of life, then, how soothing is the thought that our great intercessor with God was a fellow-sufferer with ourselves, while he passed through this vally of tears!

But was it necessary for Christ, it may be said, to assume our nature in order to acquire the knowledge of its infirmity and distress? As a divine person, was he not perfectly acquainted with our frame before he descended to the earth? Did he stand in need of being prompted to compassion by the experience of our sorrows? Could his experimental knowledge of human weakness increase the benevolence of a nature which before was perfect?—No: he submitted to be *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and to be tempted like as we are*; not in order to become acquainted with our nature, but to satisfy us that he knew it perfectly; no in order to acquire

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any new degree of goodness, but to give us the firmer confidence in the goodness which he possessed, and to convey the sense of it to our hearts with greater effect.

Distrust is a weakness peculiarly incident to the miserable. They are apt to reject hope, to indulge fear, and to tinge with the dark colour of their own minds every object which is offered for their encouragement. The representations given us of the Deity in Scripture afford undoubtedly much ground for trust in his goodness. But the perfection of an Almighty Being, who dwelleth in the secret place of eternity, *whom no man hath seen or can see*, is overwhelming to a timid apprehension. The goodness which it promises is a new and unknown form of goodness. Whatever proceeds from a nature so far superiour to our own, is beheld with a degree of awe which is ready to overpower hope. Upon this account, under the Old Testament dispensation, the Supreme Being is often described with the attributes of a man, in order to give a shade and softening to his greatness, and to accommodate his goodness more to our capacity. The relentings of a friend, the pity of a parent, and the sighs of a mourner, are ascribed to the Almighty. But we easily perceive such attributes to be no more than figures and allusions. The comfort which they afford is not definite nor precise. They leave the mind under an anxious uncertainty lest it err in its interpretation of those allegories of mercy. In the person of Jesus Christ the object of our trust is brought nearer to ourselves; and of course adapted more effectually to our encouragement. Those well-known tender affections, which are only figuratively ascribed to the Divinity, are in our great Mediator thoroughly realized. His goodness is the goodness of human nature exalted and rendered perfect. It is that species of goodness with which, of all others, we are best acquainted, compassion to the unhappy; and compassion cultivated

ted by that discipline which we know to be the most powerful, the experience of sorrows.

For such reasons as these, *because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, Christ himself likewise took part of the same. In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful, as well as a faithful high priest.* When we consider his assumption of our nature in this light, what a mild and amiable aspect does it give to the government of heaven! What attentive solicitude of goodness is shown in carrying on the dispensation of our redemption upon a plan so perfectly calculated to banish all distrust, and to revive the most timid and dejected heart! How naturally does that inference follow which the Apostle makes in the verse immediately succeeding the text; *let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need!* More particularly, in consequence of the doctrine which I have illustrated, we are taught to hope.

I THAT under all our infirmities and errors, regard will be had to human imperfection; that a merciful distinction will be made between what is weak and what is wilfully criminal in our conduct; and that such measures of obedience only will be exacted as are proportioned to our circumstances and powers. What can more encourage our religious services, than to be assured that the God whom we worship *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*; and that the Mediator, through whom we worship him, *is touched with the feelings of our infirmities*? The most virtuous are the most apt to be dejected with the sense of their frailty. While vain and superficial men are easily flattered with favourable views of themselves, and fond hopes of divine acceptance, the slightest apprehension of guilt is ready to alarm the humble and delicate mind; just as on coarse bodies an impression is not easily made, while those of finer

finer contexture are soon hurt ; and as on an exquisite polish the least speck is visible. But though religion promotes great sensibility to all feelings of a moral nature, yet it gives no countenance to excessive and superstitious fears. That humility which checks presumption, and that jealousy which inspires vigilance, are favourable to piety ; while those suspicions which lead to despondency are injurious to God, hurtful to ourselves, and repugnant to that whole system of mercy which I have been illustrating.

You complain, that when you engage in the solemn exercises of devotion, your spirits are depressed by a load of cares and sorrows ; that in your thoughts there is no composure, and in your affections no elevation ; that after your utmost essays you are incapable of fixing your attention steadily on God, or of sending up your prayers to him with becoming warmth and fulness of heart. This debility and wandering of mind you are apt to impute to some uncommon degree of guilt. You consider it as the symptom of incurable hardness of heart, and a melancholy proof of your being abandoned by God.—Such fears as these in a great measure refute themselves. If you were really obdurate, you would be insensible of guilt. Your complaints of hardness of heart are an evidence of your heart being at that moment contrite and actually relenting.—Are there any circumstances of inward discomposure and perplexity of which He is unconscious who at a critical period of his life was *heavy and sore amazed* ; who was obliged to complain that his soul was *troubled within him* ; and to acknowledge, that though *the spirit was willing, yet the flesh was weak* ? To a superiour nature, untouched with human frailty, you might in such situations look up with some degree of terror. But he who remembers the struggles of his own soul, will not, surely, judge yours like a hard

hard and unfeeling master. Acquainted with the inmost recesses of human nature, he perceives the sincerity of your intentions; he sees the combat you maintain; he knows how much of your present confusion and disorder is to be imputed, not to your inclination and will, but to an infirm, an aged or diseased body, or to a weak and wounded spirit; and therefore will be far from rejecting your attempts to serve him, on account of the infirmities which you lament. He hears the voice of those secret aspirations which you are unable to express in words, or to form into prayer. Every penitential tear which your contrition sheds, pleads your cause more powerfully with him, than all the arguments with which you could fill your mouth.

II. FROM our Saviour's experience of human misery, we may justly hope that he will so compassionately regard our distressed estate, as to prevent us from being loaded with unnecessary troubles. He will not wantonly add affliction to the afflicted; nor willingly crush what he sees to be already broken. In the course of that high administration which he now exercises, he may indeed judge certain enter-mixtures of adversity to be proper for our improvement. These are trials of virtue through which all, without exception, must pass. Rugged was the road by which our divine Mediator himself went before us to glory; and by becoming our companion in distress, he meant to reconcile us to our lot. He ennobled adversity, by sharing it with us. He raised poverty from contempt, by assuming it for his own condition. The severity of his trials tends to lighten ours. When the general of an army lies on the same hard ground, drinks of the same cold stream, carries the same weight of armour with the lowest centinel, can any of his soldiers repine at what they endure?

Whatever afflictions our Lord may judge to be
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necessary for us, of this we may rest assured, that he will deal them forth, not with harsh and imperious authority, but with the tenderness of one who knows from experience how deeply the human heart is wounded by every stroke of adversity. He will not lay more upon us than he sees we are able to bear. *Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his tender mercies. He will stay his rough wind in the day of the east wind.* For it is his state, but not his nature, which is now changed. Notwithstanding his high exaltation, he still retains the compassionate sentiments of *the man of sorrows*. Still, we are assured by an inspired writer, *he is not ashamed to call us his brethren*. And with the heart of a brother he regards those few and troubled days, such as his own once were, which good men are doomed to pass in this evil world.

From his compassion, indeed, we are not to expect that fond indulgence or unseasonable relief by which the weak pity of men frequently induces its objects. It is to the material interests, more than to the present ease, of good men, that he attends. When under the impatience of sorrow we exclaim, *Hath he forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* we recollect not in whose hands we are. His compassion is not diminished when its operations are most concealed. It continues equally to flow, though the channels by which it is conducted towards us lie too deep for our observation. Amidst our present ignorance of what is good or ill for us in this life, it is sufficient for us to know, that the immediate administration of universal government is placed in the hands of the most attentive and compassionate friend of mankind. How greatly does this consideration alleviate the burden of human woe! How happily does it connect with the awful dispensations of religion the mildest ideas of tenderness and humanity.

III. THE text leads us to hope that amidst all the infirmities of our state, both under the temptations and under the distresses of life, our blessed Lord will afford us a proper measure of assistance and support. *In that he hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them who either suffer or are tempted*; that is, he is perfectly qualified for discharging this beneficent office; he knows exactly where the wound bleeds, where the burden presses, what relief will prove most seasonable, and how it can be most successfully applied. The manner in which it is conveyed by him to the heart we may be at a loss to explain; but no argument can be thence drawn against the credibility of the fact. The operations which the power of God carries on in the natural world are no less mysterious than those which we are taught to believe that his spirit performs in the moral world. if we can give no account of what is every day before our eyes, how a seed becomes a tree, or how the child rises into a man, is it any wonder that we should be unable to explain how virtue is supported, and constancy strengthened, by God within the heart? If men by their counsels and suggestions can influence the minds of one another, must not divine suggestion and counsel produce a much greater effect? Surely, the Father of Spirits must, by a thousand ways, have access to the spirits which he has made, so as to give them what determination, or impart to them what assistance he thinks proper, without injuring their frame, or disturbing their rational powers.

Accordingly, wherever any notions of religion have taken place among mankind, this belief has in some measure prevailed, that to the virtuous under distress aid was communicated from above. This sentiment is so congruous to our natural impressions of the divine benignity, that both among poets and philosophers of ancient times it was a favourite idea, and often occurs in their writings. But what among them

was no more than loose conjecture or feeble hope has received full confirmation from the gospel of Christ. Not only is the promise of divine assistance expressly given to Christians, but their faith in that promise is strengthened by an argument which must carry conviction to every heart. If Christ had full experience of the insufficiency of human nature to overcome the difficulties wherewith it is now surrounded, will he withhold from his followers that grace without which he sees they must perish in the evil day? If in the season of his temptation and distress, an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him, shall no celestial messenger be employed by him on the like kind errand to those whom he styles his brethren? Can we believe that he who once bore our griefs and carried our sorrows will, from that height of glory to which he is now exalted, look down upon us here contending with the storm of adversity, labouring to follow his steps through the steep and difficult parts of virtue, exposed on every side to arrows aimed against us by the powers of darkness; and that, seeing our distress, and hearing our supplications, he will remain an unconcerned spectator, without vouchsafing us either assistance to support our frailty, or protection to screen us amidst surrounding dangers? Where were then the benevolence of divine Nature? Where, the compassion of that mediator who was trained to mercy in the school of sorrow? Far from us be such ungrateful suspicions of the generous friend of human kind! Let us exert ourselves as we can, and we shall be assisted. Let us pray, and we shall be heard; for there is one to present our prayers whom the father heareth always. These, will he say, are my followers on earth, passing through that thorny path of temptation and sorrow which I once trode. Now I am no more in the world; but these are in the world. Holy Father! thine they were, and thou gavest them me. Keep them through thine own name. Sanctify them

them through thy trust. Keep them from the evil one; that they may be where I am, and may behold the glory which thou hast given me.

Such is the comfort which arises to us from our Saviour's participation of the infirmities of human nature; and thus it may be applied to various situations of anxiety and distress.

WHEN we review what has been said, it is necessary that, in the first place, I guard you against a certain misimprovement which may be made of this doctrine. The amiable view which it gives of our Lord's clemency may flatter some men with unwarrantable hopes, and lead them to imagine that in his experience of human weakness an apology is to be found for every crime. Persons of this character must be taught that his compassion differs widely from that undistinguishing and capricious indulgence which is sometimes found among men. It is the compassion of an impartial mind, enlightened by wisdom and guided by justice, extending to the frailties of the sincere, but not to the sins of the presumptuous, and least of all to the crimes of those who encourage themselves in evil from the hope that they shall meet with compassion.

A course of deliberate guilt admits of no apology from the weakness of human nature. For notwithstanding all the infirmities incident to it, no man is under a necessity of being wicked. So far is our Saviour's experience of our nature from affording any ground of hope to presumptuous offenders, that it ought to fill them with terror. For it shows them how thoroughly qualified he is to discriminate accurately the characters of men, and to mark the boundaries between frailty and perverseness. He who from his own feelings well knows all the workings of the human heart, clearly discerns how different their temper is from what was once his own. He perceives that vice, not virtue, is their choice; and that,

that instead of resisting temptation, they resist conscience. He sees that infirmity affords them no excuse; and that the real cause of their acting a criminal part, is not because they cannot do better, but, in truth, because they will not. Having forfeited every title to compassion, they are left in the hands of justice, and according as *they have sown*, they must expect to reap.

BUT, in the next place, to such as are sincere and upright, the doctrine which I have illustrated affords high encouragement and powerfully recommends the Christian Religion. It places that religion in its proper point of view, as a medicinal plan, intended both for the recovery of mankind from guilt, and for their consolation under trouble. *The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* The law was a dispensation of mere authority. The Gospel is a dispensation, not of authority only, but of relief. If it discovers new duties, and imposes new obligations, it opens also sources of comfort which were before unknown to the world.

A Mediator between God and his creatures was an object after which men in all nations, and under all forms of religion, had long and anxiously sought. The follies of superstition have served to disclose to us, in this instance, the sentiments of nature. The whole religion of Paganism was a system of mediation and intercession. Depressed by a conscious sense of guilt, nature shrunk at the thought of adventuring on a direct approach of the Sovereign of the universe; and laboured to find out some auspicious introducer to that awful presence. With blind and trembling eagerness, the nations fled to subordinate deities, to tutelar gods, and to departed spirits, as their patrons and advocates above. Then they studied to sooth with such costly gifts, such pompous rites, or such humble supplications. as they thought
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might incline them to favour their cause, and to support their interest with the Supreme Divinity. While mankind were bewildered in this darkness, the Gospel not only revealed the true Mediator, who in this view may be justly called *the desire of all nations*, but placed his character and office in a light most admirably fitted, as has been shewn in this Discourse, to support the interest of virtue in the world; and to encourage the humble, without flattering the presumptuous. What plan of religion could be more suited to the circumstances of man, or more worthy of the goodness of his Creator? What more animating to the pious worshipper in performing those solemn acts of devotion to which we are called by the service of this day?

I CANNOT conclude without taking notice how remarkable this dispensation of religion is calculated to promote a spirit of humanity and compassion among men, by those very means which it employs for inspiring devotion towards God. We are now drawing nigh to the Supreme Being through a Mediator, for whose compassion we pray on account of the experience which he has had of our frailty. We trust, that having been acquainted with distress, he *will not despise nor abhor the affliction of the afflicted*. The argument by which we plead for his compassion concludes still more strongly for mutual charity, and sympathy with one another. He who, in the midst of the common sufferings of life, feels not for the distressed; he who relents not at his neighbour's griefs, nor scans his failings with the eye of a brother, must be sensible that he excludes himself from the commiseration of Christ. He makes void the argument by which he pleads for his mercy; nay he establishes a precedent against himself. Thus the Christian religion approves itself as worthy of God, by connecting devotion in strict union with charity. As in its precepts the love of God and the love of man

man are joined, so in its institutions the exercise of both is called forth; and to worship God through the mediation of a compassionate high priest, necessarily supposes in the worshippers a spirit of compassion towards their own brethren.

S E R M O N XXI.

JOHN xii. 43.

For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

THE state of man on earth is manifestly designed for the trial of his virtue. Temptations every where occur; and perpetual vigilance and attention are required. There is no passion, or principle of action in his nature, which may not, if left to itself, betray him into some criminal excess. Corruption gains entrance, not only by those passions which are apparently of dangerous tendency, such as covetousness, and love of pleasure; but by means of those also which are seemingly the most fair and innocent, such as the desire of esteem and praise. Of this the text suggests a remarkable instance. When our Lord appeared in the land of Judæa, the purity of his doctrine, and the evidence of his miracles, acquired him a considerable number of followers, chiefly among the lower classes of men. But the Pharisees, who were the leading and fashionable sect, galled with the freedom of his reproofs, decried him as an impostor. Hence it came to pass, that though *some of the rulers believed in him, yet, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him.* Rulers, persons who, by their rank and education,

ought to have been superiour to any popular prejudice, were so far overawed by the opinions of others, as to stifle their conviction, to dissemble their faith, and to join with the prevailing party in condemning one whom in their hearts they revered: for which, this reason is given, that *they loveth the praise of men more than the praise of God.* Since, then, the love of praise can mislead men into such culpable and dishonest conduct, let us, with some attention, examine the nature of this passion. Let us consider how far it is an allowable principle of action; when it begins to be criminal; and upon what accounts we ought to guard against its acquiring the entire ascendancy.

We are intended by Providence to be connected with one another in society. Single unassisted individuals could make small advances towards any valuable improvement. By means of society our wants are supplied, and our lives rendered comfortable; our capacities are enlarged, and our virtuous affections called forth into proper exercises. In order to confirm our mutual connection, it was necessary that some attracting power, which had the effect of drawing men together, and strengthening the social ties, should pervade the human system. Nothing could more happily fulfill this purpose, than our being so formed as to desire the esteem, and to delight in the good opinion, of each other. Had such a propensity been wanting, and selfish principles left to occupy its place, society must have proved an unharmonious and discordant state. Instead of mutual attraction, a repulsive power would have prevailed. Among men who had no regard to the approbation of one another, all intercourse would have been jarring and offensive. For the wisest ends, therefore, the desire of praise was made an original and powerful principle in the human breast.

To a variety of good purposes it is subservient,
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and on many occasions co-operates with the principle of virtue. It awakens us from sloth, invigorates activity, and stimulates our efforts to excel. It has given rise to most of the splendid, and to many of the useful enterprizes of men. It has animated the patriot, and fired the hero. Magnanimity, generosity and fortitude are what all mankind admire. Hence such as were actuated by the desire of extensive fame, have been prompted to deeds which either participated of the spirit, or, at least, carried the appearance of distinguished virtue. The desire of praise is generally connected with all the finer sensibilities of human nature. It affords a ground on which exhortation, counsel and reproof can work a proper effect. Whereas to be entirely destitute of this passion betokens an ignoble mind, on which no moral impression is easily made. Where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach; and if that be extinguished, one of the principal guards of virtue is removed, and the mind thrown open to many opprobrious pursuits. He whose countenance never glowed with shame, and whose heart never beat at the sound of praise, is not destined for any honourable distinction; is likely to grovel in the sordid quest of gain, or to slumber life away in the indolence of selfish pleasures.

Abstracting from the sentiments which are connected with the love of praise as a principle of action, the esteem of our fellow-creatures is an object which, on account of the advantages it brings, may be lawfully pursued. It is necessary to our success in every fair and honest undertaking. Not only our private interest, but our public usefulness, depends in a great measure upon it. The sphere of our influence is contracted or enlarged in proportion to the degree in which we enjoy the good opinion of the public. Men listen with an unwilling ear to one whom they do not honour; while a respected character

rafter adds weight to example, and authority to counsel. To desire the esteem of others for the sake of its effects is not only allowable, but in many cases is our duty: and to be totally indifferent to praise or censure, is so far from being a virtue, that it is a real defect in character.

BUT while the love of praise is admitted to be in so many respects a natural and useful principle of action, we are at the same time to observe that it is entitled to no more than our secondary regard. It has its boundaries set; by transgressing which, it is at once transformed from an innocent into a most dangerous passion. More sacred and venerable principles claim the chief direction of human conduct. All the good effects which we have ascribed to the desire of praise, are produced by it when remaining in a subordinate station. But when passing its natural line, it becomes the ruling spring of conduct; when the regard which we pay to the opinions of men, incroaches on that reverence which we owe to the voice of conscience and the sense of duty; the love of praise having then gone out of its proper place, instead of improving, corrupts; and instead of elevating, debases our nature. The proportion which this passion holds to other principles of action is what renders it either innocent or criminal. The crime with which the Jewish rulers are charged in the text, was not that they loved the praise of men; but that they loved *it more than the praise of God*.

Even in cases where there is no direct competition between our duty and our fancied honour, between the praise of men and the praise of God, the passion for applause may become criminal by occupying the place of a better principle. When vainglory usurps the throne of virtue, when ostentation produces actions which conscience ought to have dictated; such actions, however specious, have no claim to moral or religious praise. We know that good deeds done
mercy

merely to be seen of men lose their reward with God. If, on occasion of some trying conjuncture which makes us hesitate concerning our line of conduct, the first question which occurs to us be, not whether an action is right in itself, and such as a good man ought to perform, but whether it is such as will find acceptance with the world, and be favourable to our fame, the conclusion is too evident that the desire of applause has obtained an undue ascendant. What a wise and good man ought to study, is to preserve his mind free from any such solicitude concerning praise as may be in hazard of overcoming his sense of duty. The approbation of men he may wish to obtain, as far as is consistent with the approbation of God. But when both cannot be enjoyed together, there ought to be no suspense. He is to retire contented with the testimony of a good conscience; and to show by the firmness of his behaviour, that, in the cause of truth and virtue, he is superiour to all opinion.—Let us now proceed to consider the arguments which should support such a spirit, and guard us against the improper influence of praise or censure in the course of our duty.

In the first place, the praise of men is not an object of any such value in itself as to be entitled to become the leading principle of conduct. We degrade our character when we allow it more than subordinate regard. Like other worldly goods, it is apt to dazzle us with a false lustre; but if we would ascertain its true worth, let us reflect both on whom it is bestowed, and from whom it proceeds. Were the applause of the world always the reward of merit; were it appropriated to such alone as by real abilities, or by worthy actions, are entitled to rise above the crowd, we might justly be flattered by possessing a rare and valuable distinction. But how far is this from being the case in fact? How often have the despicable and the vile, by dexterously catching the favour of the

multitude, soared upon the wings of popular applause, while the virtuous and the deserving have been either buried in obscurity, or obliged to encounter the attacks of unjust reproach? The laurels which human praise confers are withered and blasted by the unworthiness of those who wear them. Let the man who is vain of public favour be humbled by the reflection that, in the midst of his success, he is mingled with a crowd of imposters and deceivers, hypocrites and enthusiasts, of ignorant pretenders and superficial reasoners, who, by various arts, have attained as high a rank as himself in temporary fame.

We may easily be satisfied that applause will be often shared by the undeserving, if we allow ourselves to consider from whom it proceeds. When it is the approbation of the wise only and the good which is pursued, the love of praise may then be accounted to contain itself within just bounds, and to run in its proper channel. But the testimony of the discerning few, modest and unassuming as they commonly are, forms but a small part of the public voice. It seldom amounts to more than a whisper, which amidst the general clamour is drowned. When the love of praise has taken possession of the mind, it confines not itself to an object so limited. It grows into an appetite for indiscriminate praise. And who are they that confer this praise? A mixed multitude of men, who in their whole conduct are guided by humour and caprice, far more than by reason; who admire false appearances, and pursue false goods; who inquire superficially, and judge rashly; whose sentiments are for the most part erroneous, always changeable, and often inconsistent. Nor let any one imagine, that by looking above the crowd, and courting the praise of the fashionable and the great, he makes sure of true honour. There are a great vulgar, as well as a small. Rank often makes no difference in the understandings of men, or in their judicious distribution of praise. Luxury,
pride,

pride, and vanity, have frequently as much influence in corrupting the sentiments of the great, as ignorance, bigotry, and prejudice, have in misleading the opinions of the crowd.—And is it to such judges as these that you submit the supreme direction of your conduct? Do you stoop to court their favour as your chief distinction, when an object of so much juster and higher ambition is presented to you in *the praise of God*? God is the only unerring judge of what is excellent. His approbation alone is the substance, all other praise is but the shadow, of honour. The character which you bear in his sight is your only real one. How contemptible does it render you to be indifferent with respect to this, and to be solicitous about a name alone; a fictitious, imaginary character, which has no existence except in the opinions of a few weak and credulous men around you? They see no farther than the outside of things. They can judge of you by actions only; and not by the comprehensive view of all your actions, but by such merely as you have had opportunity of bringing forth to public notice. But the Sovereign of the world beholds you in every light in which you can be placed. The silent virtues of a generous purpose and a pious heart attract his notice equally with the most splendid deeds. From him you may reap the praise of good actions which you had no opportunity of performing. For he sees them in their principle; he judges of you by your intentions; he knows what you would have done. You may be in his eyes a hero or a martyr, without undergoing the labours of the one, or the suffering of the other. His inspection, therefore, opens a much wider field for praise than what the world can afford you; and for praise, too, certainly far more illustrious in the eye of reason. Every real artist studies to approve himself to such as are knowing in his art. To their judgment he appeals. On their approbation he rests his character, and not

On the praise of the unskilled and rude. In the highest art of all, that of life and conduct, shall the opinions of ignorant men come into the most distant competition with his approbation who is the searcher of all hearts, and the standard of all perfection? — The testimony of his praise is not indeed, as yet, openly bestowed. But though the voice of the Almighty sound not in your ears, yet by conscience, his sacred viceroy, it is capable of being conveyed to your hear. The softest whisper of divine approbation is sweeter to the soul of a virtuous man, than the loudest shouts of that tumultuary applause which proceeds from the world.

Consider, farther, how narrow and circumscribed in its limits that fame is which the vain-glorious man so eagerly pursues. In order to show him this, I shall not bid him reflect that it is confined to a small district of the earth; and that when he looks a little beyond the region which he inhabits, he will find himself as much unknown as the most obscure person around him. I shall not desire him to consider, that in the gulph of oblivion, where all human memorials are swallowed up, his name and fame must soon be inevitably lost. He may imagine that ample honours remain to gratify ambition, though his reputation extend not over the whole globe, nor last till the end of time. But let him calmly reflect, that within the narrow boundaries of that country to which he belongs, and during that small portion of time which his life fills up, his reputation, great as he may fancy it to be, occupies no more than an inconsiderable corner. Let him think what multitudes of those among whom he dwells are totally ignorant of his name and character; how many imagine themselves too important to regard him; how many are too much occupied with their own wants and pursuits to pay him the least attention; and where his reputation is in any degree spread, how often

ten it has been attacked, and how many rivels are daily rising to abate it. Having attended to these circumstances, he will find sufficient materials for humiliation in the midst of the highest applause.— From all these considerations it clearly appears, that though the esteem of our fellow-creatures be pleasing, and the pursuit of it, in a moderate degree, be fair and lawful, yet that it affords no such object to desire as entitles it to be a ruling principle.

In the second place, an excessive love of praise never fails to undermine the regard due to conscience, and to corrupt the heart. It turns off the eye of the mind from the ends which it ought chiefly to keep in view; and sets up a false light for its guide. Its influence is the more dangerous, as the colour which it assumes is often fair; and its garb and appearances are nearly allied to that of virtue. The love of glory, I before admitted, may give birth to actions which are both splendid and useful. At a distance they strike the eye with uncommon brightness; but on a nearer and stricter survey, their lustre is often tarnished. They are found to want that sacred and venerable dignity which characterizes true virtue. Little passions and selfish interests entered into the motives of those who performed them. They were jealous of a competitor. They sought to humble a rival. They looked round for spectators to admire them. All is magnanimity, generosity, and courage, to public view. But the ignoble source whence these seeming virtues take their rise is hidden. Without, appears the hero; within, is found the man of dust and clay. Consult such as have been intimately connected with the followers of renown; and seldom or never will you find that they held them in the same esteem with those who viewed them from afar. There is nothing except simplicity of intention, and purity of principle, that can stand the test of near approach and strict examination.

But

But supposing the virtue of vain-glorious men not to be always false, it certainly cannot be depended upon as firm or sure. Constancy and steadiness are to be looked for from him only whose conduct is regulated by a sense of what is right; *whose praise is not of men, but of God*; whose motive to discharge his duty is always the same. Change, as much as you please, the situation of such a man; let applause or let censure be his lot; let the public voice, which this day has extolled him, to-morrow as loudly decry him; on the tenour of his behaviour these changes produce no effect. He moves in a higher sphere. As the sun in his orbit is not interrupted by the mists and storms of the atmosphere below, so, regardless of the opinions of men, *through honour and dishonour, through good report and bad report*, he pursues the path which conscience has marked out. Whereas the apparent virtues of that man whose eye is fixed on the world, are precarious and temporary. Supported only by circumstances, occasions, and particular regards, they fluctuate and fall with these. Excited by public admiration, they disappear when it is withdrawn; like those exhalations which, raised by heat from the earth, glitter in the air with momentary splendour, and then fall back to the ground from whence they spring.

They intemperate love of praise not only weakens the true principles of probity, by substituting inferior motives in their stead, but frequently also impels men to actions which are directly criminal. It obliges them to follow the current of popular opinion whithersoever it may carry them; and hence *shipwreck* is often made both *of faith and of a good conscience*. According as circumstances lead them to court the acclamations of the multitude, or to pursue the applause of the great, vices of different kinds will stain their character. In one situation they will make hypocritical professions of religion. In another they will be
ashamed

ashamed of their Redeemer, and of his words. They will be afraid to appear in their own form, or to utter their genuine sentiments. Their whole character will become fictitious; opinions will be assumed, speech and behaviour modelled, and even the countenance formed, as prevailing taste exacts. From one who has submitted to such prostitution for the sake of praise, you can no longer expect fidelity or attachment on any trying occasion. In private life he will be a timorous and treacherous friend. In public conduct, he will be supple and versatile; ready to desert the cause which he had espoused, and to veer with shifting every wind of popular favour. In fine, all becomes unbound and hollow in that heart where, instead of regard to the divine approbation, there reigns the sovereign desire of pleasing men.

In the third place, this passion, when it becomes predominant, most commonly defeats its own end, and deprives men of the honour which they are so eager to gain. Without preserving liberty and independence, we can never command respect. That servility of spirit which subjects us to the opinions of others, and renders us tributaries to the world for the sake of applause, is what all mankind despise. They look up with reverence to one who unawed by their censures, acts according to his own sense of things, and follows the free impulse of an honourable mind. But him who hangs totally on their judgment, they consider as their vassal. They even enjoy a malignant pleasure in humbling his vanity, and withholding that praise which he is seen to court. By artifice and show he may shine for a time in the public eye; but it is only as long as he can support the belief of acting from principle. When the inconsistencies into which he falls detect his character, his reputation passes away, like the pageant of a day. No man ever obtained lasting fame who did not, on several occasions, contradict the prejudices of popular opinion.

There

There is no course of behaviour which will at all times please all men. That which pleases most universally, and which only commands durable praise, is religion and virtue. Sincere piety towards God, kind affection to men, and fidelity in the discharge of all the duties of life; a conscience pure and undefiled; a heart firm to justice and to truth, superiour to all terrors that would shake, and insensible to all pleasures that would betray it; unconquerable by the opposition of the world, and resigned to God alone; these are the qualities which render a man truly respectable and great. Such a character may, in evil times, incur unjust reproach. But the clouds which envy or prejudice has gathered around it will gradually disperse; and its brightness will come forth, in the end, as the noon day. As soon as it is thoroughly known, it finds a witness in every breast. It forces approbation even from the most degenerate. The human heart is so formed as to be attuned, if we may use the expression, to its praise. In fact, it is this firm and inflexible virtue, this determined regard to principle beyond all opinion, which has crowned the characters of such as now stand highest in the rolls of lasting fame. The truly illustrious are they who did not court the praise of the world, but who performed the actions which deserved it. They were perhaps traduced, in their lifetime, by those whom they opposed. But posterity has done them ample justice; and they are the men whom the voice of ages now concurs in celebrating. *The memorial of virtue is immortal; because it is approved of God and of men. When it is present, men take example at it; and when it is gone, they desire it. It weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever; having gotten the victory; striving for undefiled rewards.*

In the fourth place, as an immoderate passion for human praise is dangerous to virtue, and unfavourable of true honour, so it is destructive of self-enjoyment

ment and inward peace. Regard to the praise of God prescribes a simple and constant tenour of conduct, which in all situations is the same; which engages us in no perplexities, and requires no artful refinement. *Walking uprightly, we walk surely*, because we tread an even and open path. But he who turns aside from the straight road of duty in order to gain applause, involves himself in an intricate labyrinth. He will be often embarrassed concerning the course which he ought to hold. His mind will be always on the stretch. He will be obliged to listen with anxious attention to every whisper of the popular voice. The demands of those masters whom he has submitted to serve, will prove frequently contradictory and inconsistent. He has prepared a yoke for his neck which he must resolve to bear, how much soever it may gall him.

The toils of virtue are honourable. The mind is supported under them by the consciousness of acting a right and becoming part. But the labours to which he is doomed who is enslaved to the desire of praise, are aggravated by reflexion both on the uncertainty of the recompence which he pursues, and on the debasement to which he submits. Conscience will from time to time remind him of the improper sacrifices which he has made, and of the forfeiture which he has incurred of the praise of God for the sake of praise from men. Suppose him to receive all the rewards which the mistaken opinion of the world can bestow, its loudest applause will often be unable to drown the upbraidings of an inward voice; and if a man is reduced to be ashamed of himself, what avails it him to be caressed by others?

But, in truth, the reward towards which he looks who proposes human praise as his ultimate object, will be always flying, like a shadow, before him. So capricious and uncertain, so fickle and mutable is the favour of the multitude, that it proves the most unsatisfactory

satisfactory of all pursuits in which men can be engaged. He who sets his heart on it, is preparing for himself perpetual mortifications. If the greatest and best can seldom retain it long, we may easily believe that from the vain and undeserving it will suddenly escape. There is no character but what on some side is vulnerable by censure. He who lifts himself up to the observation and notice of the world is, of all men, the least likely to avoid it. For he draws upon himself a thousand eyes that will narrowly inspect him in every part. Every opportunity will be watched of bringing him down to the common level. His errors will be more divulged, and his infirmities more magnified, than those of others. In proportion to his eagerness for praise will be his sensibility to reproach. Nor is it reproach alone that will wound him. He will be as much dejected by silence and neglect. He puts himself under the power of every one to humble him, by withholding expected praise. Even when praise is bestowed, he is mortified by its being either faint or trite. He pines when his reputation stagnates. The degree of applause to which he has been accustomed grows insipid; and to be always praised from the same topics, becomes at last much the same with not being praised at all.

All these chagrins and inquietudes are happily avoided by him who keeps so troublesome a passion within its due bounds; who is more desirous of being truly worthy than of being thought so; who pursues the praise of the world with manly temperance, and in subordination to the praise of God. He is neither made giddy by the intoxicating vapour of applause, nor humble and cast down by the unmerited attacks of censure. Resting on a higher approbation he enjoys himself in peace, whether human praise stays with him, or flies away. *With me it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment. He that*

judgeth

judgeth me is the Lord. My witness is in Heaven, and my record is on high.

IN the fifth and last place, the advantages which redound from the praise of men, are not such as can bear to be put in competition with those which flow from the praise of God. The former are necessarily confined within the verge of our present existence. The latter follow us beyond the grave, and extend through all eternity. Not only is the praise of men limited in its effects to this life, but also to particular situations of it. In the days of health and ease it may brighten the sunshine of prosperity. It may then sooth the ear with pleasing accents, and gratify the imagination with fancied triumphs. But when the distressful season of life arrive, it will be found altogether hollow and substantial. And surely, the value of any possession is to be chiefly estimated by the relief which it can bring us in the time of our greatest need. When the mind is cast down with sorrow and grief when sickness spreads its gloom around us, or death rises in awful prospect to our view, the opinions and the discourses of the world will appear trifling and insignificant. To one who is occupied with nearer and more affecting interests, the praise or the censure of the world will seem like the noise of distant voices, in which he has small concern. But then is the season when the praise of God supports and upholds the labouring soul. Brought home to the heart by the testimony of a good conscience, and by the divine spirit bearing witness with our spirits, it inspires fortitude, and produces a peace which passeth understanding.

At present we behold an irregular and disordered state of things. Virtue is often deprived of its proper honours, and vice usurps them in its stead. The characters of men are mistaken; and ignorance and folly dispose of human applause. but the day hastens apace which shall close this scene of errors, and vindicate

dicare the rights of justice and truth. Then shall be rendered to every man according to his works. Envy shall no longer have the power of obscuring merit, nor popular prejudices be able to support the undeserving. Hidden worth shall be brought to light, and secret crimes revealed. Many who passed through the world in the silent obscurity of humble, but steady goodness, shall be distinguished as the favourites of Heaven; while the proud, the ambitious, and the vain, are left to everlasting dishonour. The great Judge hath declared, that *whosoever has been ashamed of him and of his works, of that man shall he be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with all the holy angels.* Every departure from duty shall at the period of final distribution terminate in ignominy. True honour and true virtue shall be seen to coincide; and when all human fame has passed away like smoke, the only praise which shall be for ever remembered is that divine testimony, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

THESE arguments clearly show the importance of preserving the love of praise under proper subordination to the principle of duty. In itself, it is an useful motive to action; but when allowed to extend its influence too far, it corrupts the whole character, and produces guilt, disgrace, and misery. To be entirely destitute of it, is a defect. To be governed by it, is depravity. The proper adjustment of the several principles of action in human nature is a matter that deserves our highest attention. For when any one of them becomes either too weak or too strong, it endangers both our virtue and our happiness. *Keep thy heart therefore with all diligence; pray that God would enable thee to keep it with success; for out of the heart are the issues of life.*

SERMON

S E R M O N XXII.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 8.

Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity.

NO serious maxim has been more generally adopted than that of the text. In every age, the vanity of human life has been the theme of declamation, and the subject of complaint. It is a conclusion in which men of all characters and ranks, the high and the low, the young and the old, the religious and the worldly, have more frequently concurred than in any other. But how just soever the conclusion may be the premises from which it is drawn are often false. For it is prompted by various motives, and derived from very different views of things. Sometimes the language of the text is assumed by a sceptic who cavils at Providence, and censures the constitutions of the world. Sometimes it is the complaint of a peevish man who is discontented with his station, and ruffled by the disappointment of unreasonable hopes. Sometimes it is the style of the licentious, when groaning under miseries in which their vices have involved them. Invectives against the vanity of the world which come from any of these quarters deserve no regard; as they are the dictates of impiety, of spleen, or of folly. The only case in which the sentiment of the text claims our attention, is when uttered, not as an aspersion on Providence, or a reflection on human affairs in general; not as the language of private discontent, or the result of guilty sufferings; but as the sober conclusion of a wise and good man concerning the imperfection of that happiness

ness which rest solely on worldly pleasures. These, in their fairest form, are not what they seem to be. They never bestow that complete satisfaction which they promise; and therefore he who looks to nothing beyond them shall have frequent cause to deplore their vanity.

Nothing is of higher importance to us as men and as Christians, than to form a proper estimate of human life, without either loading it with imaginary evils, or expecting from it greater advantages than it is able to yield. It shall be my business, therefore, in this Discourse, to distinguish a just and religious sense of the vanity of the world from the unreasonable complaints of it which we often hear. I shall endeavour, I. To shew in what sense it is true that all earthly pleasures are vanity. II. To inquire how this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its great Author. III. To examine whether there are not some real and solid enjoyments in human life which fall not under this general charge of vanity. And, IV. To point out the proper improvement to be made of such a state as the life of man shall appear on the whole to be.

I. I AM to shew in what sense it is true that all human pleasures are vanity. This is a topic which might be embellished with the pomp of much description. But I shall studiously avoid exaggeration, and only point out a threefold vanity in human life which every impartial observer cannot but admit; disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment, uncertainty in possession.

First, disappointment in pursuit. When we look around us on the world, we every where behold a busy multitude, intent on the prosecution of various designs which their wants or desires have suggested. We behold them employing every method which ingenuity can devise, some the patience of industry, some the boldness of enterprise, others the dexterity

of

of stratagem, in order to compass their ends. Of this incessant stir and activity, what is the fruit? In comparison of the crowd who have toiled in vain, how small is the number of the successful? Or rather, where is the man who will declare that in every point he has completed his plan, and attained his utmost wish? No extent of human abilities has been able to discover a path which, in any line of life, leads unerringly to success. *The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding.* We may form our plans with the most profound sagacity, and with the most vigilant caution may guard against dangers on every side. But some unforeseen occurrence comes across which baffles our wisdom, and lays our labours in the dust.

Were such disappointments confined to those who aspire at engrossing the higher departments of life, the misfortune were less. The humiliation of the mighty, and the fall of ambition from its towering height, little concern the bulk of mankind. These are objects on which, as on distant meteors, they gaze from afar, without drawing personal instruction from events so much above them. But, alas! when we descend into the regions of private life, we find disappointment and blasted hope equally prevalent there. Neither the moderation of our views, nor the justice of our pretensions, can ensure success. *But time and chance happen to all.* Against the stream of events both the worthy and the undeserving are obliged to struggle; and both are frequently over-born alike by the current.

BETTER disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment is a farther vanity to which the human state is subject. This is the severest of all mortifications, after having been successful in the pursuit, to be baffled in the enjoyment itself. Yet this is found to be an evil still more general than the former. Some may be so fortunate as to attain what they have pursued; but none are rendered completely happy

by

by what they have attained. Disappointed hope is misery; and yet successful hope is only imperfect bliss. Look through all the ranks of mankind. Examine the condition of those who appear most prosperous; and you will find that they are never just what they desire to be. If retired, they languish for action; if busy, they complain of fatigue. If in middle life, they are impatient for distinction; if in high stations, they sigh after freedom and ease. Something is still wanting to that plenitude of satisfaction which they expected to acquire. Together with every wish that is gratified, a new demand arises. One void opens in the heart as another is filled. On wishes, wishes grow; and to the end, it is rather the expectation of what they have not, than the enjoyment of what they have, which occupies and interests the most successful.

This dissatisfaction in the midst of human pleasure springs partly from the nature of our enjoyments themselves, and partly from circumstances which corrupt them. No worldly enjoyments are adequate to the high desires and powers of an immortal spirit. Fancys paint them at a distance with splendid colours; but possession unveils the salacy. The eagerness of passion bestows upon them at first a brisk and lively relish. But it is their fate always to pall by familiarity, and sometimes to pass from satiety into disgust. Happy would the poor man think himself if he could enter on all the treasures of the rich; and happy for a short while he might be. But before he had long contemplated and admired his state, his possessions would seem to lessen, and his cares would grow.

Add to the unsatisfying nature of our pleasures the attending circumstances which never fail to corrupt them. For, such as they are, they are at no time possessed unmixed. To human lips it is not given to taste the cup of pure joy. When external circumstances show fairest to the world, the envied man
groans

groans in private under his own burthen. Some vexation disquiets, some passion corrodes him; some distress either felt or feared, gnaws, like a worm, the root of his felicity. When there is nothing from without to disturb the prosperous, a secret poison operates within. For worldly happiness ever tends to destroy itself, by corrupting the heart. It fosters the loose and the violent passions. It engenders noxious habits; and taints the mind with a false delicacy, which makes it feel a thousand unreal evils.

BUT put the case in the most favourable light. Lay aside from human pleasures both disappointment in pursuit, and deceitfulness in enjoyment; suppose them to be folly attainable, and completely satisfactory; still there remains to be considered the vanity of uncertain possession and short duration. Were there in worldly things any fixed point of security which we could gain, the mind would then have some basis on which to rest. But our condition is such, that every thing wavers and totters around us. *Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It is much if, during its course, thou hearest not of some what to disquiet or alarm thee. For life never proceeds long in an uniform train. It is continually varied by unexpected events. The seeds of alteration are every where sown; and the sunshine of prosperity commonly accelerates their growth. If your enjoyments be numerous, you lie more open on different sides to be wounded. If you have possessed them long, you have greater cause to dread an approaching change. By slow degrees prosperity rises; but rapid is the progress of evil. It requires no preparation to bring it forward. The edifice which it cost much time and labour to erect, one inauspicious event, one sudden blow, can level with the dust. Even supposing the accidents of life to leave us untouched, human bliss must still be transitory; for man changes of himself. No course of enjoyment can de-
light

light us long. What amused our youth loses its charm in maturer age. As years advance, our powers are blunted, and our pleasurable feelings decline. The silent lapse of time is ever carrying somewhat from us, till at length the period comes when all must be swept away. The prospect of this termination of our labours and pursuits is sufficient to mark our state with vanity. *Our days are a hand-breadth, and our age is as nothing.* Within that little space is all our enterprise bounded. We crowd it with toils and cares, with contention and strife. We project great designs, entertain high hopes, and then leave our plans unfinished, and sink into oblivion.

This much let it suffice to have said concerning the vanity of the world. That too much has not been said, must appear to every one who considers how generally mankind lean to the opposite side; and how often by undue attachment to the present state; they both feed the most sinful passions, and *pierce themselves through with many sorrows.* Let us proceed to enquire.

II. How this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its divine Author. This enquiry involves that great difficulty which has perplexed the thoughtful and serious in every age; If God be good, whence the evil that fills the earth? In answer to this interesting question, let us observe,

In the first place, that the present condition of man was not his original or primary state. We are informed by divine revelation, that it is the consequence of his voluntary apostacy from God and a state of innocence. By this, his nature was corrupted; his powers were enfeebled; and vanity and vexation introduced into his life. All nature became involved in the condemnation of man. The earth was cursed upon his account, and the whole creation made to *groan and travail in pain.*

How mysterious soever the account of this fall may

may appear to us, many circumstances concur to authenticate the fact, and to shew that human nature and the human state have undergone an unhappy change. The belief of this has obtained in almost all nations and religions. It can be traced through all the fables of antiquity. An obscure tradition appears to have pervaded the whole earth, that man is not now what he was at first; but that, in consequence of some transgression against his great Lord a state of degradation and exile succeeded to a condition that was more flourishing and happy. As our nature carries plain marks of perversion and disorder, so the world which we inhabit bears the symptoms of having been convulsed in all its frame. Naturalists point out to us every where the traces of some violent change which it has suffered. Islands torn from the continent, burning mountains, shattered precipices, uninhabitable wastes, give it all the appearance of a mighty ruin. The physical and moral state of man in this world mutually sympathize and correspond. They indicate not a regular and orderly structure either of matter or of mind, but the remains of somewhat that once was more fair and magnificent. Let us observe;

In the second place, that as this was not the original, so it is not intended to be the final state of man. Though in consequence of the abuse of the human powers, sin and vanity were introduced into this region of the universe, it was not the purpose of the Creator that the should be permitted to reign for ever. He hath made ample provision for the recovery of the penitent and faithful part of his subjects, by the merciful undertaking of that great restorer of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. By him *life and immortality were both purchased and brought to light. The new heavens and the new earth are discovered, wherein dwelleth righteousness*; where, through the divine grace, human nature shall regain its original

P honours,

honours, and man shall return to be what once he was in Paradise. Through those high discoveries of the Gospel, this life appears to good men only in the light of an intermediate and preparatory state. Its vanity and misery, in a manner, disappear. They have every reason to submit without complaint to its laws, and to wait in patience till the appointed time come for *the restitution of all things*. Let us take notice.

In the third place, that, a future state being made known, we can account in a satisfying manner for the present distress of human life, without the smallest impeachment of divine goodness. The sufferings we here undergo are converted into discipline and improvement. Thorough the blessing of Heaven, good is extracted from apparent evil; and the very misery which originated from sin is rendered the means of correcting sinful passions, and preparing us for felicity. There is much reason to believe that creatures as imperfect as we are, require some such preliminary state of experience before they can recover the perfection of their nature. It is in the midst of disappointments and trials that we learn the insufficiency of temporal things to happiness, and are thought to seek it from God and Virtue. By these the violence of our passions is tamed, and our minds are formed to sobriety and reflection. In the varieties of life, occasioned by the vicissitude of worldly fortune, we are inured to habits both of the active and the suffering virtues. How much soever we complain of the vanity of the world, facts plainly show, that if its vanity were less, it could not answer the purpose of salutary discipline. Unsatisfactory as it is, its pleasures are still too apt to corrupt our hearts. How fatal then must the consequences have been, had it yielded us more complete enjoyment? If, with all its troubles, we are in danger of being too much attached to it, how entirely would it have seduced our affections, if no troubles had been mingled with its pleasures?

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These observations serve in a great measure to obviate the difficulties which arise from the apparent vanity of the human state, by showing how, upon the Christian system, that vanity may be reconciled with the infinite goodness of the Sovereign of the Universe. The present condition of man is not that for which he was originally designed; it is not to be his final state; and during his passage through the world, the distresses which he undergoes are rendered medicinal and improving. After having taken this view of things, the cloud which, in the preceding part of the discourse, appeared to sit so thick upon human life begins to be dissipated. We now perceive that man is not abandoned by his Creator. We discern great and good designs going on in his behalf. We are allowed to entertain better hopes; and are encouraged to enquire, as was proposed for the

III. HEAD of discourse, Whether there be not in the present condition of human life some real and solid enjoyments which come not under the general charge of *vanity of vanities*. The doctrine of the text is to be considered as chiefly addressed to worldly men. Them Solomon means to teach that all expectations of bliss which rest solely on earthly possessions and pleasures, shall end in disappointment. But surely he did not intend to assert that there is no material difference in the pursuits of men, or that no real happiness of any kind could now be attained by the virtuous. For besides the unanswerable objection which this would form against the divine administration, it would directly contradict what he elsewhere asserts, that while *God giveth sore travail to the sinner, he giveth to the man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy*. It may, it must indeed be admitted, that unmixed and complete happiness is unknown on earth. No regulation of conduct can altogether prevent passions from disturbing our peace, and misfortunes from wounding our heart. But after this concession is

made, will it follow that there is no object on earth which deserves our pursuit, or that all enjoyment becomes contemptible which is not perfect? Let us survey our state with an impartial eye, and be just to the various gifts of Heaven. How vain soever this life, considered in itself, may be, the comforts and hopes of religion are sufficient to give solidity to the enjoyments of the righteous. In the exercise of good affections, and the testimony of an upright conscience; in the sense of peace and reconciliation with God through the great Redeemer of Mankind; in the firm confidence of being conducted through all the trials of life by infinite wisdom and goodness; and in the joyful prospect of arriving in the end at immortal felicity, they possess a happiness which, descending from a purer and more perfect region than this world, partakes not of its vanity.

Besides the enjoyments peculiar to religion, there are other pleasures of our present state which, though of an inferior order, must not be overlooked in the estimate of human life. It is necessary to call attention to these, in order to check that repining and unthankful spirit to which man is always too prone. Some degree of importance must be allowed to the comforts of health, to the innocent gratifications of sense, and to the entertainment afforded us by all the beautiful scenes of nature; some to the pursuits and amusements of social life; and more to the internal enjoyments of thought and reflection, and to the pleasures of affectionate intercourse with those whom we love. These comforts are often held in too low estimation, merely because they are ordinary and common; although that be the circumstance which ought, in reason, to enhance their value. They lie open, in some degree, to all; extend through every rank of life, and fill up agreeably many of those spaces in our present existence, which are not occupied with higher objects, or with serious cares.

We are in several respects unjust to Providence in the computation of our pleasures and our pains. We number the hours which are spent in distress or sorrow but we forget those which have passed away, it not in high enjoyment, yet in the midst of those gentle satisfactions, and placid emotions, which make life glide smoothly along. We complain of the frequent disappointments which we suffer in our pursuits. But we recollect not that it is in pursuit, more than in attainment, that our pleasure now consists. In the present state of human nature, man derives more enjoyment from the exertion of his active powers in the midst of toils and efforts, than he could receive from a still and uniform possession of the object which he strives to gain. The solace of the mind under all its labours, is hope; and there are few situations which entirely exclude it. Forms of expected bliss are often gleaming upon us through a cloud, to revive and exhilarate the most distressed. If pains be scattered through all the conditions of life, so also are pleasures. Happiness, as far as life affords it, can be engrossed by no rank of men to the exclusion of the rest; on the contrary, it is of an found where, at first view, it would have been least expected. When the human condition appears most depressed, the feelings of men, through the gracious appointment of Providence, adjust themselves wonderfully to their state, and enable them to extract satisfaction from sources that are totally unknown to others. Were the great body of men fairly to compute the hours which they pass in ease, and even with some degree of pleasure, they would be found far to exceed the number of those which are spent in absolute pain either of body or mind. — But in order to make a still more accurate estimation of the degree of satisfaction which, in the midst of earthly vanity, man is permitted to enjoy, the three following observations claim our attention.

The first is, that many of the evils which occasion

our complaints of the world are wholly imaginary. They derive their existence from fancy and humour, and childish subjection to the opinions of others. The distress which they produce, I admit, is real; but its reality arises not from the nature of things, but from that disorder of imagination which a small measure of reflection might rectify. In proof of this we may observe, that the persons who live most simply, and follow the dictates of plain unadulterated nature, are most exempted from this class of evils. It is among the higher ranks of mankind that they chiefly abound; where fantastic refinements, sickly delicacy, and eager emulation, open a thousand sources of vexation peculiar to themselves. Life cannot but prove vain to them who affect a disrelish of every pleasure that is not both exquisite and new; who measure enjoyment, not by their own feelings, but by the standard of fashion who think themselves miserable if others do not admire their state. It is not from wants or sorrows that their complaints arise; but, though it may appear a paradox, from too much freedom from sorrow and want; from the languor of vacant life, and the irritation occasioned by those stagnating humours which ease and indulgence have bred within them. In their case, therefore, it is not their minds, which is to be accused. Fancy has raised up the spectres which haunt them. Fancy has formed the cloud which hangs over their life. Did they allow the light of reason to break forth, the spectres would vanish, and the cloud be dispelled.

THE second observation on this head is, that of those evils which may be called real, because they owe not their existence to fancy, nor can be removed by rectifying opinion, a great proportion is brought upon us by our own misconduct. Diseases, poverty, disappointment and shame are far from being, in every instance the unavoidable doom of men. They are much more frequently the offspring of their own misguided choice. Intemperance engenders disease, sloth

loth produces poverty; pride creates disappointments, and dishonesty exposes to shame. The ungoverned passions of men betray them into a thousand follies; their follies into crimes; and their crimes into misfortunes. Yet nothing is more common than for such as have been the authors of their own misery, to make loud complaints of the hard fate of man, and to take revenge upon the human condition by arraigning its supposed vanity. *The foolishness of man first perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

I do not, however maintain that it is within our power to be altogether free of those self-procured evils. For perfection of any kind is beyond the reach of man. Where is the wisdom that never errs? Where the just man that offendeth not? Nevertheless, much is here left to ourselves; and, imperfect as we are, the consequences of right or of wrong conduct make a wide difference in the happiness of men. Experience every day shows that a sound, a well-governed, and virtuous mind contributes greatly to smooth the path of life; and that *wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble. But the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way; and he that walketh uprightly walketh surely.* The tendency of the one is towards a plain and safe region. The course of the other leads him amidst snares and precipices. The one occasionally may, the other unavoidably must, incur much trouble. Let us not then confound, under one general charge, those evils of the world which belong to the lot of humanity, and those which, through divine assistance, a wise and good man may, in a great measure, escape.

THE third observation which I make respects those evils which are both real and unavoidable; from which neither wisdom nor goodness can procure our

exemption. Under these this comfort remains, that if they cannot be prevented, there are means, however, by which they may be much alleviated. Religion is the great principle, which acts, under such circumstances, as the corrective of human vanity. It inspires fortitude, supports patience, and by its prospects and promises darts a cheering ray into the darkest shade of human life. If it cannot secure the virtuous from disappointment in their pursuits, it forms them to such a temper as renders their disappointments more light and easy than those of other men. If it does not banish dissatisfaction from their worldly pleasures, it confers spiritual pleasures in their stead. If it ensures them not the possession of what they love, it furnishes comfort under the loss. As far as it establishes a contented frame of mind, it supplies the want of all that worldly men covet to possess. Compare the behaviour of the sensual and corrupted with that of the upright and holy, when both are feeling the effects of human vanity, and the difference of their situation will be manifest. Among the former you are like to find a querulous and dejected, among the latter, a composed and manly spirit. The lamentations of the one excite a mixture of piety and contempt; while the dignity which the other maintain in distress command respect. The sufferings of the former settle into a peevish and fretful disposition; those of the latter soften the temper and improve the heart. These consequences extend so far as to give ground for asserting, that a good man enjoys more happiness in the course of a seemingly unprosperous life, than a bad man does in the midst of affluence and luxury. What a conspicuous proof of this is afforded by the Apostle Paul, who from the very depth of affliction could send forth such a triumphant voice as proclaims the complete victory which he had gained over the evils of life? *Troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair;*

despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. For though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed, day by day. Such, though perhaps in an inferior degree, will be the influence of a genuine religious principle upon all true Christians. It begins to perform that office to them here, which hereafter it will more completely discharge, of wiping away the tears from their eyes.

SUCH, upon the whole, is the estimate which we are to form of human life. Much vanity will always belong to it, though the degree of its vanity will depend, in a great measure, on our own character and conduct. To the vicious, it presents nothing but a continued scene of disappointment and dissatisfaction. To the good, it is a mixed state of things; where many real comforts may be enjoyed; where many resources under trouble may be obtained; but where trouble, in one form or other, is to be expected as the lot of man. From this view of human life,

THE first practical conclusion which we are to draw is, that it highly concerns us not to be unreasonable in our expectations of worldly felicity. Let us always remember where we are; from what causes the human state has become subject to depression; and upon what accounts it must remain under its present law. Such is the insatiation of self-love, that though in the general doctrine of the vanity of the world all men agree, yet almost every one flatters himself that his own case is to be an exception from the common rule. He rests on expectations which he thinks cannot fail him; and though the present be not altogether according to his wish, yet with the confidence of certain hope he anticipates futurity. Hence the anguish of disappointment fills the world; and evils, which are of themselves sufficiently severe, oppress with double force the unprepared and unsuspecting mind. Nothing therefore is of greater consequence to our peace, than to have always before our eyes such views of the world as shall prevent our

expecting more from it than it is destined to afford. We destroy our joys by devouring them before-hand with too eager expectations. We ruin the happiness of life when we attempt to raise it too high. A tolerable and comfortable state is all that we can propose to ourselves on earth. Peace and contentment, not bliss nor transport, is the full portion of man. Perfect joy is reserved for heaven.

BUT while we repress too sanguine hopes formed upon human life, let us, in the second place, guard against the other extreme of repining and discontent. Enough has been already said to shew, that notwithstanding the vanity of the world, a considerable degree of comfort is attainable in the present state. Let the recollection of this serve to reconcile us to our condition, and to check the arrogance of complaints and murmers — What art thou, O son of man ! who having sprung but yesterday out of the dust, darest to lift up thy voice against thy Maker, and to arraign his providence, because all things are not ordered according to thy wish ? What title hast thou to find fault with the order of the universe, whose lot is so much beyond what thy virtue or merit gave thee ground to claim ? Is it nothing to thee to have been introduced into this magnificent world ; to have been admitted as a spectator of the divine wisdom and works ; and to have had access to all the comforts which nature, with a bountiful hand, has poured forth around thee ? Are all the hours forgotten which thou hast passed in ease, in complacency, or joy ? Is it a small favour in thy eyes, that the hand of divine mercy has been stretched forth to aid thee, and, if thou reject not its proffered assistance, is ready to conduct thee into a happier state of existence ? When thou comparest thy condition with thy desert, blush, and be ashamed of thy complaints. Be silent, be grateful, and adore. Receive with thankfulness the blessings which are allowed thee. Revere that government

government which at present refuses thee more. Rest in this conclusion, that though there be evils in the world, its Creator is wise and good, and has been bountiful to thee.

In the the third place, the view which we have taken of human life should naturally direct us to such pursuits as may have most influence for correcting its vanity. There are two great lines of conduct which offer themselves to our choice. The one leads towards the goods of the mind; the other towards those of fortune. The former, which is adopted only by the few, engages us chiefly in forming our principles regulating our dispositions, improving all our inward powers. The latter, which in every age has been followed by the multitude, points at no other end but attaining the conveniencies and pleasures of external life. It is obvious that, in this last pursuit, the vanity of the world will encounter us at every step. For this is the region in which it reigns, and where it chiefly displays its power. At the same time, to lay the world totally out of view is a vain attempt. The numberless ties by which we are connected with external things, put it out of our power to behold them with indifference. But though we cannot wrap ourselves up entirely in the care of the mind, yet the more we make its welfare our chief object, the nearer shall we approach to that happy independence on the world which places us beyond the reach of suffering from its vanity.

That discipline, therefore, which corrects the vagueness of worldly passions which fortifies the heart with virtuous principles, which enlightens the mind with useful knowledge, and furnishes to it matter of enjoyment from within itself, is of more consequence to real felicity, than all the provision which we can make of the goods of fortune. To this let us bend, our chief attention. *Let us keep the heart with all diligence, seeing out of it are the issues of life.* Let

us account our mind the most important province which is committed to our care ; and if we cannot rule fortune, study at least to rule ourselves. Let us purpose for our object, not worldly success, which it depends not on us to obtain, but that upright and honourable discharge of our duty in every conjuncture, which through the divine assistance, is always within our power. Let our happiness be sought where our proper praise is found ; and that be accounted our only real evil, which is the evil of our nature ; not that, which is either the appointment of Providence, or which arises from the evil of others.

BUT in order to carry on with success this rational and manly plan of conduct, it is necessary in the last place, that to moral, we join religious discipline. Under the present imperfection of our minds, and amidst the frequent shocks which we receive from human evils, much do we stand in need of every assistance for supporting our constancy. Of all assistance to which we can have recourse, none is so powerful as what may be derived from the principles of the Christian faith. He who builds on any other foundation will find, in the day of trial, that he had built his house on the sand. Man is formed by his nature to look up to a superiour Being, and to lean upon a strength that is greater than his own. All the considerations which we can offer for confirming his mind, presuppose this resource, and drive from it their principle efficacy.

Never then let us loose sight of those great objects which religion brings under our view, if we hope to stand firm and erect amidst the dangers and distresses of our present state. Let us cultivate all that connection with the great Father of Spirits which our condition admits ; by biety and prayer ; by dependence on his aid, and trust in his promises ; by a devout sense of his presence, and a continual endeavour to acquire his grace and favour. Let us, with humble
faith

faith and reverence, commit ourselves to the blessed Redeemer of the world ; encouraged by the discoveries which he has made to us of the divine mercy, and by the hopes which he has afforded us of being raised to a nobler and happier station in the kingdom of God. So shall virtue grounded upon piety, attain its full strength. Inspired with a religious spirit, and guided by rational principles, we shall be enabled to hold a steady course through this mixed region of pleasure and pain, of hopes and fears ; until the period arrive when that cloud which the present vanity of the world throws over human affairs shall entirely disappear, and eternal light be diffused over all the works and ways of God.

S E R M O N XXIII.

P S A L M xxiii. 4.

Yea though I walked through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

THIS Psalm exhibits the pleasing picture of a pious man rejoicing in the goodness of Heaven. He looks around him on his estate, and his heart overflows with gratitude. When he reviews the past part of his life, he contemplates God as his shepherd who hath made him lie down in green pastures, and led him beside the still waters. When he considers the present, he beholds his divine benefactor preparing a table for him in the presence of his enemies, and making his cup run over. When he looks forward to the future, he confides in the same goodness, as continuing to follow him all the days of his life, and bringing him to dwell

dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Amidst these images of tranquillity and happiness, one object presents itself, which is sufficient to overcast the minds and to damp the joy of the greatest part of men; that is, the approach of death. But on the Psalmist it produced no such effect. With perfect composure and serenity he looks forward to the time when he is to pass through *the valley of the shadow of death.* The prospect, instead of dejecting him, appears to heighten his triumph, by that security which the presence of his almighty guardian afforded him. *I will fear no evil; for thou art with me:* and pursuing the allusion with which he had begun, exults in the hope that the shepherd who had hitherto conducted him would support him with his *staff*, while he passed through that dark and perilous region, and with his *rod*, or pastoral crook, would guard him from every danger.

Such is the happy distinction which good men enjoy, in a situation the most formidable to human nature. That threatening spectre which appalls others, carries no terror to them. While worldly men are justly said *through fear of death to be all their life-time subject to bondage*, to the righteous only it belongs to look on death, and smile. Since then it is in the power of religion to confer upon us so high a privilege, let us adventure to contemplate steadily this last foe whom we must all encounter. Let us consider what death is in itself and by what means good men are enabled to meet it with fortitude. Though the subject may be reckoned gloomy, it must be admitted to be interesting. The close of life is a solemn and important event, to which every wise man will have regard in the general tenour of his conduct. No one can act his part with propriety, who considers not how it is to terminate; and to exclude from our thoughts what we cannot prevent from actually taking place, is the refuge of none but the timorous and

and weak. We are more encouraged to enter on this meditation by reflecting on the superiour advantages which, as Christians, we enjoy for overcoming the fear of death, beyond that holy man whose sentiment is now before us. Those great objects, which he beheld through the medium of types and figures, are clearly revealed to us. That dispensation of grace, which in his days began to open, is now completed. That life and immortality, which then only dawned on the world, have now shone forth with full light and splendour,

DEATH may be considered in three views; as the separation of the soul from the body; as the conclusion of the present life; as the entrance into a new state of existence. In the first view, it is regarded as painful and agonizing. In the second, it is melancholy and dejecting. In the third, it is awful and alarming. One of the first enquiries which occurs concerning it is, for what it was clothed with all these terrors? Why under the government of a gracious Being, the termination of life was loaded with so much sorrow and distress? We know that, in consequence of the fall, death was inflicted as punishment upon the human race. But no unnecessary severities are ever exercised by God; and the wisdom and goodness of the divine plan will be much illustrated, by observing that all the formidable circumstances which attend death are, in the present situation of mankind, absolutely requisite to the proper government of the world. The terrors of death are, in fact, the great guardians of life. They excite in every individual that desire of self-preservation, which is nature's first law. They reconcile him to bearing the distresses of life with patience. They prompt him to undergo its useful and necessary labours with alacrity; and they restrain him from many of those evil courses by which his safety would be endangered. While they are in so many respects beneficial to the individual,

dual, they are at the same time, the safeguard of society. If death were not dreaded and abhorred as it is by men, no public order could be preserved in the world. The sword of authority were lifted up in vain. The sanctions of law would lose their effect. The scaffold and the executioner would be derided; and the violent left to trample unrestrained on the rights of the peaceful. If, notwithstanding the restraints which self-preservation imposes, society is so often disturbed by the crimes of the wicked, what a scene of confusion would it become, if capital punishments, which are the last resource of government, were of no influence to deter offenders?

For such importance ends the conclusion of life has, by the appointment of Providence, been made an awful object. The valley of death has been planted with terrors to the apprehension of men. Here, as in many other instances, what seemed at first to arraign the goodness of the Deity, is upon enquiry found to confirm it. But though, for the most salutary purposes, it was requisite that the fear of death should be a powerful principle in human nature, yet, like our other propensities, it is apt, when left to itself, to run into excess. Over many it usurps such an ascendant as to debase their character, and to defend the chief ends of living. To preserve it within such bounds that it shall not interrupt us in performing the proper offices and duties of life, is the distinction of the brave man above the coward; and to surmount it in such a degree that it shall not, even in near prospect, deject our spirit, or trouble our peace, is the great preference which virtue enjoys above guilt. It has been the study of the wise and reflecting, in every age, to attain this steadiness of mind. Philosophy pursued it as its chief object and professed that the great end of its discipline was, to enable its votaries to conquer the fear of death. Let us then, before we have recourse to the more powerful aid of religion,

religion, harken for a little to what reason has suggested on this object. Her assistance may, perhaps, be not entirely despicable; and though the armour which she offers be not completely of proof, it may serve, however, to turn aside, or to blunt some of the shafts which are aimed against us by the last foe.

AFTER this manner she may be supposed to address mankind, in order to reconcile them to their fate.—Children of men! it is well known to you that you are a mortal race. Death is the law of your nature, the tribute of your being, the debt which all are bound to pay. On these terms you received life, that you should be ready to give it up when Providence calls you to make room for others, who in like manner, when their time is come, shall follow you. He who is unwilling to submit to death when heaven decrees it, deserves not to have lived. You might as reasonably complain that you did not live before the time appointed for your coming into the world, as lament that you are not to live longer when the period of your quitting it is arrived. What divine Providence hath made necessary, human prudence ought to comply with cheerfully. Submit at any rate you must; and is it not much better to follow of your own accord, than to be dragged reluctantly, and by force? What privilege have you to plead, or what reason to urge, why you should possess an exemption from the common doom? All things around you are mortal and perishing. Cities, states, and empires have their periods set. The proudest monuments of human art moulder into dust. Even the works of nature wax old and decay. In the midst of this universal tendency to change, could you expect that to your frame alone a permanent duration should be given? All who have gone before you have submitted to the stroke of death. All who are to come after you shall undergo the same fate. The great

great and the good, the prince and the peasant, the renowned and the obscure, travel alike the road which leads to the grave. At the moment when you expire, thousands throughout the world shall, together with you, be yielding up their breath. Can that be held a great calamity which is common to you with every thing that lives on earth ; which is an event as much according to the course of nature as it is that leaves should fall in autumn, or the fruit should drop from the tree when it is fully ripe ?

The pain of death cannot be very long, and is probably less severe than what you have at other times experienced. The pomp of death is more terrifying than death itself. It is to the weakness of imagination that it owes its chief power of dejecting your spirits ; for when the force of the mind is roused, there is almost no passion in our nature but what has showed itself able to overcome the fear of death. Honour has defied death ; love has despised it ; shame has rushed upon it ; revenge has disregarded it ; grief a thousand times has wished for it. Is it not strange that reason and virtue cannot give you strength to surmount that fear, which, even in feeble minds, so many passions have conquered ? What inconsistency is there in complaining so much of the evils of life, and being at the same time so afraid of what is to terminate them all ? Who can tell whether his future life might not teem with disasters and miseries, as yet unknown, were it to be prolonged according to his wish ? At any rate, is it desirable to draw life out to the last dregs, and to wait till old age pour upon you its whole store of diseases and sorrows ? You lament that you are to die ; but did you view your situation properly, you would have much greater cause to lament if you were chained to this life for two or three hundred years, without possibility of release. Expect therefore calmly that which is natural in itself, and which must be fit, because it is the appointment

ment of heaven. Perform your duty as a good subject of the Deity, during the time allotted you; and rejoice that a period is fixed for your dismissal from the present warfare. Remember that the slavish dread of death destroys all the comfort of that life which you seek to preserve. Better to undergo the stroke of death at once, than to live in perpetual misery from the fear of dying.

SUCH discourses as these are specious at least, and plausible. The arguments are not without strength, and ought to produce some effect on a considerate reflecting mind. But it is to be suspected that their effect will be chiefly felt when the mind is calm and at ease; rather when speculating upon death at a distance, than when beholding it at hand. When the critical moment arrives which places the anxious, trembling soul on the borders of an unknown world, reasonings drawn from necessity and propriety will be of small avail to quiet its alarms. In order to afford relief, you must give it hope; you must promise it protection; you must offer somewhat on which it can lay hold for support, amidst the struggles of labouring nature. Hence the great importance of those discoveries which revelation has made, and of those principles with which it fortifies the heart. To the consideration of these let us next proceed, and observe their superiour efficacy for surmounting the fear of death. In order to judge of their importance, it will be proper to take a view of death in each of those lights in which it appears most formidable to mankind.

It may be considered, first, as the termination of our present existence; the final period of all its joys and hopes. The concluding scene of any course of action in which we have been engaged with pleasure, even the last sight of objects which we have been long accustomed to behold, seldom fails of striking the mind with painful regret. How many circumstances

stances will concur to heighten that regret, when the time comes of our bidding an eternal adieu to the light of day; to every pursuit which had occupied our attention as citizens of the world; and to every friend and relation who had attached our hearts? How dejecting is the thought to the greatest part of men, that the sun shall rise, and the seasons shall return to others, but no more to them; and that while their neighbours are engaged in the usual affairs of life, they shall be shut up in a dark and lonely mansion, forgotten, and cut off from among men, as though they had never been! *I said, in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave. I am deprived of the residuum of my years. I shall not see the Lord again in the land of the living. I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.*

Let us now observe, that the dejection into which we are apt to sink at such a juncture, will bear proportion to the degree of our attachment to the objects which we leave, and to the importance of those resources which remain with us when they are gone. He who is taking farewell of a country through which he had travelled with satisfaction; and he who is driven from his native land, with which he had connected every idea of settlement and comfort will have very different feelings at the time of departure. Such is the difference which, at the hour of death, takes place between the righteous and the ungodly. The latter knows nothing higher or better than the present state of existence. His interests, his pleasures, his expectations, all centered here. He lived solely for the enjoyments of this world. Dreadful, therefore, and insupportable must be that event which separates him from these for ever. Whereas the culture of religion had previously formed the mind of a Christian for a calm and easy transition from this life. It had instructed him in the proper estimate of sublunary happiness. It had let higher prospects before him. It had formed him to a more refined taste

taste of enjoyment than what the common round of worldly amusements could gratify. If gave him connections and alliances with spiritual objects, which are unknown to the men of the world. Hence, though he be attached to life by the natural feelings of humanity, he is raised above the weak and unmanly regret of parting with it. He knew that it was intended as preparatory only to a succeeding state. As soon as the season of preparation should be finished, he expected a removal; and when Providence gives the signal, he bids adieu to the world with composed resolution, and undisturbed heart. What though death interrupt him in the middle of his designs, and break off the plans which he had formed of being useful to his family and the world? All these he leaves with tranquility in the hands of that Providence to which he has ever been accustomed to look up with resignation; which governed the world wisely and graciously before he existed; and which he knows will continue to govern it with equal wisdom and benignity, when he shall be in it no more. The time of his departure was not left to his own choice; but he believes it to be the most proper, because it is the time chosen by Him who cannot err! *Honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair to man; and an unspotted life is old age.* When he beholds his friends and relations mourning around him, his heart may melt, but will not be overpowered; for it is relieved by the thought that he is bidding them only a temporary, not an eternal farewell. He commends them, in the mean time, to the blessing of that God whom he has served; and while he is parting from them, he hears a voice which soothes his spirit with those comforting words, *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widow trust in me.*

BUT death is more than the conclusion of human life.

life. It is the gate which, at the same time that is chosen on this world, opens into eternity. Under this view, it has often been the subject of terror to the serious and reflecting. The transition they were about to make was awful. Before them lay a vast undiscovered region, from whose bounds no traveller ever returned to bring information of the reception which he found, or of the objects which he met with there. The first conception which suggests itself is, that the disembodied spirit is to appear before its Creator, who is then to act as its judge. The strict inquisition which it must undergo, the impartial doom which it must hear pronounced, and the unalterable state to which it shall be assigned, are awful forms rising before the imagination. They are ideas which conscience forces upon all. Mankind can neither avoid considering themselves as accountable creatures, nor avoid viewing death as the season when their account is to be given. Such a sentiment is with most men the source of dread; with all men, of anxiety. To a certain degree a good conscience will convey comfort. The reflection on a well-spent life makes a wide difference between the last moments of the righteous and the sinner. But whose conscience is so clear as to strike him with no remorse? Whose righteousness is so unblemished as to abide the scrutiny of the great searcher of hearts? Who dares rest his everlasting fate upon his perfect conformity to the rule of duty throughout the whole of his life.

We must not judge of the sentiments of men at the approach of death by their ordinary train of thought in the days of health and ease. Their views of moral conduct are then, too generally, superficial; slight excuses satisfy their minds, and the avocations of life prevent their attention from dwelling long on disagreeable subjects. But when altogether withdrawn from the affairs of the world, they are left to their reflections

tions on past conduct; with their spirits enfeebled by disease, and their minds impressed with the terrors of an invisible region; the most resolute are apt to despond, and even the virtuous are in danger of sinking under the remembrance of their errors and frailties. The trembling mind casts every where around an anxious exploring eye after any power that can uphold, any mercy that will shield and save it. And accordingly we see how eagerly every device has been embraced which superstition could invent in various countries, for quieting the alarms of the departing spirit.

Here appears the great importance of those discoveries which Christianity has made concerning the government of the universe. It displays the ensigns of grace and clemency. It reveals the Almighty not as a creator only and a judge, but as a compassionate parent, *who knows our frame, who remembers we are dust, who pities us as a father pitieth his children; and with whom there is forgiveness,* that he may be loved as well as feared. These general views, however, of the divine administration, would not have been sufficient to give full relief, if they had not been confirmed by certain decisive facts, to which the mind can appeal amidst all its doubts and fears. To such facts the Gospel holds forth to us, particularly adapted to the situation of human nature in its greatest extremity; the atonement, and the intercession of Christ. There is no sentiment more natural to men than this, that guilt must be expiated by suffering. All government is founded on the principle, that public justice requires compensation for crimes; and all religions proceed upon the belief, that, in order to the pardon of the sinner, atonement must be made to the justice of heaven. Hence the endless variety of sacrifices, victims, and expiations which have filled the earth. The great sacrifice which our Redeemer offered for guilt, coincides with these natural sentiments of mankind in giving ease to the heart. It shows

shows us the forfeit of guilt paid by a divine personage in our behalf; and allows us to look up to the Governour of the world, as merciful to the guilty in consistency with justice and order. But still some anxiety might remain concerning the extension of that mercy to our own case in particular. An invisible sovereign is an awful idea; almighty, unknown power is always formidable, and would be ready to overwhelm the spirit of the feeble, were not an intercessor with that sovereign revealed. This intercessor is one who lived and acted in our own nature; who not only knows but who experienced our frailty; who has all the feelings of a brother for human infirmity and distress; who himself passed through that *valley of the shadow of death* which is now opening on us; to whose powerful mediation with his father we have every encouragement to commit the charge of our departing spirit.—Such is the provision which Christianity has made for comforting the last hours of man. The atonement, and the intercession of Christ, are the refuge of the penitent sinner, and the consolation of the saint. By their means the throne of the universe is encircled with mercy. The cloud which hung over the invisible world begins to be dispersed; and hope brightens through the gloom.

BUT what completes the triumph of good men over death is, the prospect of eternal felicity. This was the great object after which all nations have sighed, as the only complete remedy both of the miseries of life and the fears of death. On this, the learned and the ignorant, the civilized and the savage tribes of mankind bent their longing eyes; eagerly grasping at every argument, and fondly indulging every hope, that could promise them a propitious Deity, and the prolongation of existence in a happier state. But beyond wishes and feeble expectations, the light of nature could hardly reach. Even the most cultivated, philosophical mind was, at the hour of dissolution,

dissolution, left in painful suspense. Christianity has put an end to all hesitation and doubt on this important subject. It has drawn aside the veil through which reason essayed to penetrate; and has displayed to full view the future dwellings of the spirits of the just, the mansions of everlasting rest, *the city of the living God*. Not only has it informed us that a state of perfect felicity is prepared for the righteous, but it has added to this information a variety of circumstances which render that state sensible to our imagination, and encouraging to our hopes. It represents it as fully secured by the gracious undertaking of the Saviour of the world. It describes it as *an inheritance*, to which he has given his followers a right and title. He is said to have taken possession of it in their name. He rose from the grave as *the first-fruits of them that sleep* and under the character of their *fore-runner*, entered into the heavenly regions. *I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I give unto my sheep eternal life. I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*

Hence, to those who have lived a virtuous life, and who die in the faith of Christ, the whole aspect of death is changed. Death is to them no longer the tyrant who approaches with his iron rod, but the messenger who brings the tidings of life and liberty. The prospects which open to them cheer their minds. Even in the vally of death's shade, *green pastures* appear to rise. They view themselves as going forth, not to lie silent and solitary in the darkness of the grave, not to wander forsaken in the wide deserts of the universe, not even to pass into a region where they are altogether strangers and unknown; but to enter on a land, new indeed to sight, but by faith and hope frequented long before; where they shall continue to be under the charge of him who hath hitherto been their guardian, be re-united to many of their

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ancient and beloved friends, and admitted to join the *immense multitude, gathered out of all nations and tongues and people, who stand before the throne of God.* They leave behind the dregs of their nature; and exchange this confined and gloomy apartment of the universe, for the glorious mansions of their Father's house. Blessed surely are they dying in this hope, and *blessed the dead in this fruition, resting from their labours and followed by their works.* Good men are detained at present in the outer court of the temple: Death admits them into the holy place. As yet they sojourn in the territories of pilgrimage and exile: Death brings them home to the native land of Spirits. In this world they are divided from one another, and mingled with the worthless and the vile: Death united in one assembly all the pure and the just. *In the sight of the universe they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for utter destruction. But they are in peace. Their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them with the most High.*—O Death! where is now thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory? Where are the terrors with which thou hast so long affrighted the nations? Where are the dreary and the desolate domains, the haunts of spectres and shades, the abhorred dwellings of darkness and corruption? At the touch of the divine rod, thy visionary horrors have fled. The spell is broken. The dawn of the celestial morning has dispelled thy dismal gloom; and instead of the *habitation of dragons,* appears the paradise of God.

BUT supposing both the regret of quitting life, and the dread of entering into a future state to be overcome, there is still one circumstance which renders death formidable to many, that is, the shock which nature is apprehended to sustain at the separation of the soul from the body. Formidable, I admit, this may justly render it to them whose languishing spirits have no inward fund whence they can then draw relief. Firmness

ness and strength of mind is peculiarly requisite for the support of nature in its last extremity; and that strength is supplied by religion. The testimony of a good conscience, and the remembrance of a virtuous life, a well-grounded trust in the divine acceptance, and a firm hope of future felicity, are principles sufficient to give composure and fortitude to the heart, even in the midst of agony. In what a high degree they can suspend or alleviate the feelings of pain, has been fully demonstrated by the magnanimous behaviour of such as have suffered death in the cause of conscience and religion. How often has the world beheld them advancing to meet that supposed king of terrors, not with calmness only, but with joy; raised by divine prospects and hopes into an entire neglect and contempt of bodily suffering?

It is not without reason that a peculiar assistance from heaven is looked for by good men, at the hour of death. As they are taught to believe, that in all the emergencies of their life divine goodness has watched over them, they have ground to conclude, that at the last it will not forsake them; but that at the season when its aid is most needed, it shall be most liberally communicated. Accordingly, a persuasion so congruous to the benignity and compassion of the Father of mercies has been the comfort of pious men in every age. *My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart. In the vally of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.* When the rod and staff of this shepherd of Israel are held forth to his expiring servants, declining nature needs no other support. The secret influence of his reviving spirit is sufficient for their consolation and strength, while the painful struggle with mortality lasts; till at length, when the moment arrives that *the silver cord must be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken*, their Almighty Protector carries off the immortal spirit unhurt by the fall of its earthly tabernacle,

and places it in a better mansion.—How respectable and happy is such a conclusion of human life, when one in this manner quits the stage of time, honoured and supported with the presence of his Creator, and enjoying, till the last moment of reflection, the pleasing thought, that he has not lived in vain ! *I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course ; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day.*

AFTER the view which we have taken of the advantages possessed by good men for overcoming the fears of death, the first sentiment which should arise in our minds is gratitude to Heaven for the hopes which we enjoy by means of the Christian religion. How depressed and calamitous was the human condition, as long as the terrour of death hung, like a dark cloud, over the inhabitants of the earth ; when, after all the toils of life, the melancholy silence of the grave appeared finally to close the scene of existence ; or, if a future state opened behind it, that state teemed with all those forms of horror which conscious guilt could suggest to a terrified imagination ! The happiest change which ever took place in the circumstances of the human race, is that produced by the discoveries with which we are blessed concerning the government of the universe, the redemption of the world, and the future destination of man. How much dignity is thereby added to the human character and state ? What light and cheartulness is introduced into our abode ? What eternal praise is due to him who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven ?

THE next effect which the subject we have considered should produce, is an earnest desire to acquire those

those advantages which good men enjoy at their death. The road which leads to them is plain and obvious. A peaceful and happy death is, by the appointment of Heaven, connected with a holy and virtuous life. Let us renounce criminal pursuits and pleasures; let us fear God and keep his commandments; let us *bold faith and good conscience*, if we hope for comfort at our last hour. To prepare for this last hour, every wise man should consider as his most important concern. Death may justly be held the test of life. Let a man have supported his character with esteem and applause, as long as he acted on the busy stage of the world, if at the end he sinks into dejection and terrors, all his former honour is effaced; he departs under the imputation of either a guilty conscience, or a pusillanimous mind. In the other parts of human conduct, disguise and subtlety may impose on the world; but seldom can artifice be supported in the hour of death. The mask most commonly falls off, and the genuine character appears. When we behold the scene of life closed with proper composure and dignity, we naturally infer integrity and fortitude. We are led to believe that divine assistance supports the soul, and we presage its transition into a happier mansion. *Mark the perfect man and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.*

THE last instruction which our subject points out, respects the manner in which a wise and good man ought to stand affected towards life and death. He ought not to be servilely attached to the one. He has no reason abjectly to dread the other. Life is the gift of God, which he may justly cherish and hold dear. Nay, he is bound by all fair means to guard and preserve it, that he may continue to be useful in that post of duty where Providence has placed him. But there are higher principles to which the love of life should remain subordinate. Wherever religion, virtue, or true honour, call him forth to danger, life

ought to be hazarded without fear. There is a generous contempt of death which should distinguish those who live and walk by the faith of immortality. This is the source of courage in a Christian. His behaviour ought to shew the elevation of his soul above the present world; ought to discover the liberty which he possesses of following the native sentiments of his mind, without any of those restraints and fetters which the fear of death imposes on vicious men.

At the same time, this rational contempt of death must carefully be distinguished from that inconsiderate and thoughtless indifference, with which some have affected to treat it. This is what cannot be justified on any principle of reason. Human life is no trifle, which men may play away at their pleasure. Death, in every view, is an important event. It is the most solemn crisis of the human existence. A good man has reason to meet it with a calm and firm mind. But no man is entitled to treat it with ostentatious levity. It calls for manly seriousness of thought. It requires all the recollection of which we are capable; that with the proper disposition of dependent beings, when the dust is about to return to its dust, we may deliver up the spirit to Him who gave it.

S E R M O N XXIV.

Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

REVELAT. vii. 9.

After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

IN this mysterious book of Scripture many revolutions are foretold which were to take place in the church

church of God. They are not indeed so foretold as to afford clear and precise information concerning the time of their coming to pass. It would have been, on many accounts, improper to have lifted up too far that awful veil which covers futurity. The intention of the Spirit of God was not to gratify the curiosity of the learned, by disclosing to them the fate of monarchies and nations, but to satisfy the serious concerning the general plan, and final issue, of the divine government. Amidst those distresses which beset Christians during the first ages, the discoveries made in this book were peculiarly seasonable as they shewed that there was an Almighty Guardian, who watched with particular attention over the interests of the church which he had formed; who foresaw all the commotions which were to happen among the kingdoms of the earth, and would so overrule them as to promote in the end the cause of truth. This is the chief scope of those mystic visions with which the Apostle John was favoured; of seals opened in Heaven; of trumpets sounding; and vials poured forth. The kingdom of darkness was to maintain for a while a violent struggle against the kingdom of light. But at the conclusion, a voice was to be heard, *as the voice of many waters and of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever.* Such is the prospect with which the divine Spirit at intervals enlightens, and with which he finally terminates, the many dark and direful scenes that are exhibited in this book. In closing the canon of Scripture, he, with great propriety, leaves upon our mind deep impressions of the triumphs of righteousness, and of the blessedness of the redeemer. *After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and, before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.*

These words present a beautiful description of the happiness of saints in heaven; a subject on which it is, at all times, both comfortable and improving to meditate. On this day, in particular, when we are to commemorate the dying love of our Saviour, we cannot be better employed than in contemplating what his love hath purchased; in order both to awaken our gratitude, and to confirm our attachment to him. The sacrament of the supper is the oath of our fidelity. Let us dispose ourselves for celebrating it, by taking a view of the rewards which await the faithful. I shall, for this end, in several observations from the words of the text, taken in connection with the context, endeavour to illustrate, in some imperfect degree, the prospect which is here afforded us of a state of future felicity; and then shall make practical improvement of the subject.

I. WHAT the words of the text most obviously suggest is, that heaven is to be considered as a state of blessed society. *A multitude*, a numerous assembly, are here represented as sharing together the same felicity and honour. Without society, it is impossible for a man to be happy. Place him in a region where he was furrounded with every pleasure; yet there, if he found himself a solitary individual, he would pine and languish. They are not merely our wants, and our mutual dependence, but our native instincts also, which impel us to associate together. The intercourse which we here maintain with our fellows, is a source of our chief enjoyments. But, alas! how much are these allayed by a variety of disagreeable circumstances that enter into all our connexions! Sometimes we suffer from the distresses of those whom we love; and sometimes from their vices or frailties. Where friendship is cordial, it is exposed to the wounds of painful sympathy, and to the anguish of violent separation. Where it is so cool as not to occasion sympathetic pains, it is never productive

ductive of much pleasure. Their ordinary commerce of the world consists in a circulation of frivolous intercourse, in which the heart has no concern. It is generally insipid, and often soured by the slightest difference in humour, or opposition of interest. We fly to company in order to be relieved from wearisome correspondence with ourselves; and the vexations which we meet with in society, drive us back again into solitude. Even among the virtuous, dissensions arise; and disagreement in opinion too often produces alienation of heart. We form few connexions where somewhat does not occur to disappoint our hopes. The beginnings are often pleasing, We flatter ourselves with having found those who will never give us any disgust. But weaknesses are too soon discovered. Suspicions arise; and love waxes cold. We are jealous of one another, and accustomed to live in disguise. A studied civility assumes the name without the pleasure of friendship; and secret animosity and envy are often concealed under the caresses of dissembled affection.

Hence the pleasure of earthly society, like all our other pleasures, is extremely imperfect; and can give us a very faint conception of the joy that must arise from the society of perfect spirits in a happier world. Here, it is with difficulty that we can select from the corrupted crowd a few with whom we wish to associate in strict union. There are assembled all the wise, the holy, and the just who ever existed in the universe of God; without any distress to trouble their mutual bliss, or any source of disagreement to interrupt their perpetual harmony. Artifice and concealment are unknown there. There, no competitors struggle; no factions contend; no rivals supplant each other. The voice of discord never rises, the whisper of suspicion never circulates, among those innocent and benevolent spirits. Each happy, in himself, participates in the happiness of all the rest; and

by reciprocal communications of love and friendships at once receives from, and adds to the sum of general felicity. Renew the memory of the most affectionate friends with whom you were blest in any period of your life. Divest them of all those infirmities which adhere to the human character. Recal the most pleasing and tender moments which you ever enjoyed in the society ; and the remembrance of those sensations may assist you in conceiving that felicity which is possessed by the saints above. The happiness of *brethren dwelling together in unity, is, with great justice and beauty, compared by the Psalmist to such things as are most refreshing to the heart of man ; to the fragrant of the richest odours, and to the reviving influence of soft ætherial dews. It is like the precious ointment poured on the head of Aaron ; and like the dew of Hermon, even the dew that descendeth on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore.*

Besides the felicity which springs from perfect love, there are two circumstances which particularly enhance the blessedness of that *multitude who stand before the throne* ; these are, access to the most exalted society ; and renewal of the most tender connexions. The former is pointed out in the Scripture by *joining the innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and church of the first-born ; by sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven* ; a promise which opens the sublimest prospects to the human mind. It allows good men to entertain the hope, that, separated from all the dregs of the human mass, from that mixed and polluted crowd in midst of which they now dwell, they shall be permitted to mingle with prophets, patriarchs and apostles, with legislators and heroes, with all those great and illustrious spirits, who have shone in former ages as the servants of God, or the benefactors of men ; whose deeds we are accustomed to celebrate ;

lebrate; whose steps we now follow at a distance; and whose names we pronounce with veneration.

United to this high assembly, the blessed at the same time renew those ancient connexions and virtuous friends which had been dissolved by death. The prospect of this awakens in the heart the most pleasing and tender sentiment which perhaps can fill it, in this mortal state. For of all the sorrows which we are here doomed to endure, none is so bitter as that occasioned by the fatal stroke which separates us, in appearance, for ever, from those to whom either nature or friendship had intimately joined our hearts. Memory, from time to time, renews the anguish; opens the wound which seemed once to have been closed; and by recalling joys that are past and gone, touches every spring of painful sensibility. In these agonizing moments, how relieving the thought, that the separation is only temporary, not eternal; that there is a time to come of re-union with those with whom our happiest days are spent; whose joys and sorrows once were ours; and from whom, after we shall have landed on the peaceful shore where they dwell, no revolutions of nature shall ever be able to part us more!—Such is the society of the blessed above. Of such are the multitude composed who stand before the throne. Let us now observe,

II. THAT this is not only a blessed but a numerous society. It is called *a multitude, a great multitude, a great multitude which no man could number*. These expressions convey the most enlarged views of the kingdom of glory. Dismay not yourselves with the apprehension of heaven being a confined and almost inaccessible region, into which it is barely possible for a small handful to gain admission, after making their escape from the general wreck of the human race. *In my Father's house*, said our Saviour *there are many mansions*. That city of the living God towards which you profess to bend your course, is prepared

pared for the reception of citizens innumerable. It already abounds with inhabitants ; and more and more shall be added to it, until the end of time. Whatever difficulties there are in the way which leads to it, they have been often surmounted. The path, though narrow, is neither impassable, nor untrodden. Though the gate stands not so wide as that which opens into hell, yet through the narrow gate multitudes have entered, and been crowned.

— It is much to be lamented that among all denominations of Christians, the uncharitable spirit has prevailed of unwarrantably circumscribing the terms of divine grace within a narrow circle of their own drawing. The one half of a Christian world has often doomed the other, without mercy, to eternal perdition. Without the pale of that church to which each sect belongs, they seem to hold it impossible for salvation to be attained. But is this the genuine spirit of the Gospel? Can a Christian believe the effects of the sufferings of Christ, to be no greater than these? For this did the Son of God descend from the highest heavens, and power out his soul unto the death, that only a few who adopt the same modes of expression, and join in the same forms of worship with us, might be brought to the kingdom of heaven? Is this all the deliverance he has wrought upon the earth? *He was with child; he was in pain; and shall he not see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied?* Surely, the Scripture has given us full ground to conclude that the trophies of our Redeemer's grace shall correspond to the greatness of his power. *The captain of our salvation shall bring many sons with himself to glory. The pleasures of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see his seed: He shall justify many. Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.* For our farther encouragement, let us observe,

III. THAT the heavenly society is represented in the text, as gathered out of all the varieties of the human race. This is intimated by the remarkable expressions

expressions of a multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues ; as if designed on purpose to correct our narrow notions of the extent, and power of divine grace. They whom distant sea and regions now divide, whose languages and manners are at present strange to one another, shall then mingle in the same assembly. No situation is so remote, and no station so unfavourable as to preclude access to the heavenly felicity. A road is opened by the divine spirit to those blissful habitations, from all corners of the earth, and from all conditions of human life ; from the peopled city, and from the solitary desert ; from the cottages of the poor, and from the palaces of kings ; from the dwellings of ignorance and simplicity, and from the regions of science and improvement, *they shall come*, says our blessed Lord himself, *from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.*

Such discoveries serve both to enlarge our conceptions of the extent of divine goodness, and to remove those fears which are ready to raise from particular situations in life. Were you permitted to draw aside the veil, and to view that diversified assembly of the blessed who surrounded the throne, you would behold among them numbers who have overcome the same difficulties which encounter you, and which you dread as insuperable. You would behold there, the uninstructed, with whom an upright intention supplied the place of knowledge ; the feeble, whom divine grace hath strengthened ; and the misled, whom it had brought back into the right path. You would behold the young who had surmounted the allurements of youthful pleasure, and the old who had born the distresses of age with undecayed constancy ; many whom want could not tempt to dishonesty ; many whom riches did not seduce into pride or impiety ; many who in the most difficult and ensnaring circumstances,

stances, in the midst of camps and armies and corrupted courts, had preserved unfulfilled integrity. In a word from all kindredst and people, that is, from all ranks of life, and all tribes of men, even from among publicans and sinners, you would behold those whom divine assistance had conducted to future glory. And is not the same assistance, in its full extent, offered also to us? Encompassed, while we run the Christian race with this cloud of witnesses who have finished their course with success; animated, while we fight the good fight, with the shouts of those who have overcome and are crowned, shall despair enervate or deject our minds? From the happy multitude above, there issues a voice which ought to sound perpetually in the ear of faith, *Be ye faithful unto the death, and ye shall receive the crown of life; Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might; Be followers of us who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises.* Consider,

IV. THE description given in the text of the happiness and glory of the heavenly society. They were beheld by the apostle *standing before the throne, and before the lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands.* All that these palms and white robes import, it is not given us now to understand. We know that among all nations they have been used as ensigns of joy and victory; and are undoubtedly employed here to represent that distinguished felicity and honour, to which human nature shall be then advanced. But we must be endowed with the faculties of the blessed, in order to comprehend their employments and pleasures; and therefore on this part of the subject I shall not attempt to enlarge. The silence of humble and respectful hope, better becomes us than the indulgence of those excursions of fancy, which degrade the subject they endeavour to exalt.

One circumstance only cannot fail to attract particular attention; that the blessed are here described, as *standing before the throne and before the lamb*; that

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is, enjoying the immediate presence of the great Creator, and of the merciful Redeemer of the world. The unhappy distance at which we are now removed from God, is the source of all our woes. Those territories which we inhabit, are not his abode. They are regions of exile. They are the dwellings of a fallen race; and are condemned to be invested with clouds and darkness. Here, God standeth afar off. In vain we often pursue his presence through his works, his ways, and his religious institutions. He is said to be *a God that hideth himself. He dwelleth, as to us, in the secret place of thunder. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it.* The manifestation of his presence shall be the signal for the renovation of all things. When that *Sun of righteousness* breaks forth from the cloud which now conceals him, sorrow and sin, and every evil thing shall fly away before the brightness of his face. For neither guilt nor misery can remain where God dwells. As the rising of the sun transforms at once the face of nature, and converts the whole extent of space over which his beams are spread, into a region of light, so shall the divine presence, as soon as it is revealed, diffuse universal bliss over all who behold it. It imports *fullness of joy, and pleasure for evermore.* The inspired writer of this book thus describes its effects: *There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying nor pain; for the former things are passed away. He that sat upon the throne, said, Behold I make all things new. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. But the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* But, descending from this too sublime theme, let us

V. TURN our attention to a circumstance in the state of future happiness, more commensurate to our present conceptions, which is suggested by the commentary upon the words of the text given in the sequel

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quel of the chapter. *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes; and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of the great tribulation.* This explanatory circumstance may relate particularly to the case of those primitive sufferers, who endured severe persecution in the cause of the gospel. But, in general, it presents this natural and beautiful view of the future felicity of good men, that it is their rest from the troubles and toils of life. For, to all, even to the happiest, human life is tribulation and conflict. No man is thoroughly at ease in his condition. Pursuits succeeding to pursuits keep us in constant agitation, while frequent returns of disappointment break our plans, and oppress our spirits. Fatigued by such a variety of toils, mankind have ever looked forward to rest as their favourite object. Throughout all their ranks, from the highest to the lowest, they are in perpetual chase of it; and it perpetually flies before them. It is an object which here they are doomed always to seek, and never to enjoy.

The nature and laws of our present state admit not the gratification of this favourite wish. For, besides the necessity of trouble in order to fulfil the purposes of discipline and improvement, our very happiness, such as it is in this world, requires a circulation of labours. Our enjoyment consists in pursuit, not in attainment. Attainment is with us, for most part, the grave of pleasure. Had we no object to excite fresh activity, and to impel us to new toils, human life would quickly stagnate in melancholy indolence. At the same time, the current of all our wishes tend to repose. Imaginary forms float incessantly before our view, of the happiness which is to be enjoyed in rest: And from this conflict between our wishes on the one hand, and our actual situation on the other, arise much of the disquiet, and much of the infelicity,

ty, of human life. It is only in heaven that the tranquil repose, which on earth is no more than a pleasing phantom, shall be fully realized. There, *remaineth at last a rest for the people of God*; rest from the disturbance of passion, the vanity of pursuit, and the vexation of disappointment; rest from all the sins and the sorrows of this miserable world; rest which shall not be merely an indolent cessation from labour, but a full and satisfying enjoyment. Good men shall *rest from their labours, and their works shall follow them*. They have *come out of great tribulation*. They have fulfilled, with honour, their appointed course of trial. They have sat down on the seat of the conquerour; and of past labours nothing remains but the pleasing review, and the happy fruits. There is still to be considered.

VI. ONE very material circumstance, descriptive both of the character, and of the happiness, of those who enjoy the heavenly bliss. Not only have *they come out of great tribulation*, but, as the spirit of God adds in explaining the text, *they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*. Two things are here suggested; the sanctity of the blessed, and the means by which it is attained.

First, their sanctity or purity is emblematically described, by their being clothed in *robes which are washed and made white*. In order to qualify human nature for the enjoyment of such happiness as I have endeavoured to describe, it must undergo a change so great as to receive in Scripture the appellation of a *new birth*; a change to which all the institutions of religion; and all the operations of grace, contribute in this life, but which is not completed till the next. In this sanctity, or regeneration, consists not only the necessary preparation for the future felicity, but, which is not so commonly attended to, consists an essential part of that felicity itself. For, whence arises the misery of the present world? It is not owing to
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our cloudy atmosphere, our changing seasons, and our inclement skies. It is not owing to the debility of our bodies, or to the unequal distribution of the goods of fortune. Amidst all disadvantages of this kind, a pure, a stedfast, and enlightened mind, possessed of exalted virtue, could enjoy itself in peace, and smile at the impotent assaults of fortune and the elements. It is within ourselves, that misery has fixed its seat. Our disordered hearts, our guilty passions, our violent prejudices and misplaced desires are the instruments of the torments which we endure. These sharpen the darts which adversity would otherwise point in vain against us. These are the *vials of wrath* which pour forth plagues on the inhabitants of the earth; and make the dwellings of nations become the abodes of woe. Thence discontent, and remorse, gnaw the hearts of individuals. Thence society is torn by open violence, or undermined by secret treachery; and man is transformed into a savage from man.

But suppose sin to be banished from the world; suppose perfect purity and charity to descend from heaven, and to animate every human breast; and you would behold the present habitation of men changed into the paradise of God. The undisturbed enjoyment of a holy mind, and of a blissful union with one another, would scarcely allow us to feel those external evils, of which we now so loudly complain. All nature would assume a different appearance around us. That golden age which was so long the subject of the philosopher's dream, and of the poet's song, would in fact take place. According to the beautiful language of an antient prophecy, *springs would then rise in the desert, and rivers be opened in the thirsty land. The wilderness and the solitary place would be glad. The wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid. Judgment would dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.*

field. The desert would rejoice, and blossom as the rose.—If such, even in this world, would be the effects of innocence and virtue completely restored, how much greater must they be in that *new earth and those new heavens*, where rectitude of nature shall be combined with every circumstance of external felicity? It is the present imperfect state of human virtue that hinders us from conceiving fully the influence of righteousness upon happiness. The robes in which the best men are now clothed, to use the language of the text, are sullied with so many stains, as to convey no adequate idea of the original beauty which belongs to the garb of righteousness. But when these stains shall be washed away, then these robes shall be made perfectly white and pure, a lustre will flow from them of which we can, as yet form no conception.

But how are the robes of the blessed thus washed? Whence is derived that spotless purity in which they are arrayed? The Spirit of God hath answered us, *from the blood of the Lamb*; leading our thoughts to that high dispensation of mercy, to which the saints above owe their establishment, first in grace, and then in glory. From that blood which was *shed for the remission of sins*, flow both the atonement of human guilt, and regeneration of human nature. Human nature had fallen too low to be capable of retrieving itself. It could not regain its primitive innocence, and still less was capable of raising itself so high in the scale of existence as to mingle with angels. We had neither sufficient knowledge to discover, nor virtue to merit, nor ability to qualify ourselves for enjoying celestial glory. Heaven must have been either covered from our view by perpetual darkness, or only beheld from afar as an inaccessible region, if Christ had not interposed to *open for us a new and living way within the veil*. The obligations which his generous undertaking has conferred upon the human race will tend highly to increase the felicity of the

the blessed. The sense of being distinguished by so illustrious a benefactor, and the corresponding returns of gratitude and love to him, form some of the most pleasing of those emotions which shall continue to delight them through all eternity.

FROM those views of a state of future happiness which the text has suggested, various instructions relating to life and practice naturally arise. We are taught to rectify our notions of felicity; to look for it, not in what is external, but in what relates to the mind and heart; in good dispositions and a purified soul; in unity and friendship with one another, and in the divine presence and favour. If such things form the principle articles of future bliss, they cannot but be essential to our happiness in the more early periods of existence? and he who seeks his chief enjoyments from the opposite quarter, is erring widely from the path which conducts to felicity.

We are farther taught whence to derive constancy and perseverance, amidst the present discouragements of a virtuous life. In this world, we often behold good men depressed, and the wicked prospering around us. Our best deeds meet with the unjust returns from an ungrateful world. Sincerity is over-reached by craft, and innocence falls a victim to power. But let us not on such occasions say within ourselves, *that in vain we have cleansed our hearts, and washed our hands in innocence.* Let us rest on the assurance, that these disorders extend not far in the kingdom of God. They affect only the first stage of existence. They relate to discipline and trial, which will soon be finished. In that permanent state which is about to open, a new and better order of things shall arise. When dejected with the evils of life, let us look upward to that happy *multitude who have come out of grate tribulation, and now stand before the throne.* Until the day arrive which shall join us to that blessed assembly, let us show ourselves worthy of the hope that is before

before us, by supporting with a constant mind the trials of our fidelity. *Be patient; stablish your hearts. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

From the prospects which the text has afforded, we may likewise learn what the spirit is which should regulate our life. Sanctity of conduct, dignity of character, elevation of affections, become those who expect to mingle with angels, and *spirits of just men made perfect*. I mean not that such prospects should carry away our whole attention from the present world, where undoubtedly lies the chief scene of human action, and human duty. But while we act as inhabitants on earth, we ought at the same time so to remember our connection with a better world, as not to debase ourselves with what is mean, not to defile ourselves with what is impure, not to entangle ourselves among what is ensnaring, in the present state. Let neither its advantages elate, nor its disappointments deject us; but with an equal spirit, with a mind full of immortality, let us pass through all the changes of this mortal life.

Finally, let the discoveries of future happiness inspire us with suitable gratitude to God and Christ; to the eternal Father, who originally decreed such rewards for the righteous; and to the Son, who acts in the high character of the dispenser of the divine mercies, and the great restorer of the fallen race of men. Particularly, when approaching to God in solemn acts of devotion, such as we are this day to perform, let gratitude be alive and ardent in our heart. The commemoration of our Saviour's death is in a high degree suited to awaken every emotion of tenderness and love. It brings before us, under one view, all the obligations which we lie under to this great benefactor of mankind. When just ready to suffer for our sake, he instituted this holy sacrament, and said, *Do this in remembrance of me.*—Whom, O blessed Jesus! shall we ever remember, if we are capable

capable of forgetting Thee? Thee, to whom we owe the forgiveness of sin, and the restoration of divine favour; our victory over death, and our hope of life eternal! Thou hast enlarged our views beyond these territories of disorder and darkness. Thou hast discovered to us the *city of the living God*. Thou settest open the gates of that *new Jerusalem*; and leadest us into the *path of life*. Thou from age to age gatherest out of every nation, and kindred, and people, *that multitude which stand before the throne*. Thou bringest them out of great tribulation. Thine are the *white robes* with which they are invested; thine, the *palms* which they bear; and by Thee they are placed under the light of the divine countenance for ever.

S E R M O N XXV.

I CORINTH. xiii. 5.

Charity thinketh no evil.

RELIGION and Government are the two great foundations of order and comfort among mankind. Government restrains the outrages and crimes which would be subversive of society, secures the property, and defends the lives of its subjects. But the defect of government is, that human laws can extend no farther than to the actions of men. Though they protect us from external violence, they leave us open on different sides to be wounded. By the voices which prevail in society, our tranquility may be disturbed, and our lives in various ways embittered, while government can give us no redress. Religion supplies the insufficiency of law, by striking at the root of those disorders which occasion so much misery in the world.

world. Its professed scope is to regulate, not actions alone, but the temper and inclinations. By this means it ascends to the sources of conduct, and very ineffectual would the wisest system of legislation prove for the happiness of mankind, if it did not derive aid from religion, in softening the dispositions of men, and checking many of those evil passions to which the influence of law cannot possibly reach.

We are led to this reflection by the description given in the context of charity, that great principle in the Christian system. The Apostle places it in a variety of lights, and under each of them, explains its operation by its internal effects; not by the actions to which it gives rise, but by the dispositions which it produces in the heart. He justly supposes, that if the temper be duly regulated, propriety of action will follow, and good order take place in external behaviour. Of those characters of charity I have chosen one for the subject of this discourse, which leads to the consideration of a virtue highly important to us, both as Christians, and as members of society. I shall endeavour, first, to explain the temper here pointed out, by shewing what this description of charity imports, that it *thinketh no evil*; and then to recommend such a disposition, and to display the bad effects of an opposite turn of mind.

I. LET us consider what this description of charity imports. You will easily perceive that the expression in the text is not to be understood in sense altogether unlimited; as if there were no occasion on which we are to think unfavourably of others. To view all the actions of men with the same degree of complacency, would be contrary both to common understanding, and to many express precepts of religion. In a word, where so much depravity abounds, were we to think and speak equally well of all, we must either be insensible of the distinction between right and wrong, or be indifferent to that distinction when we perceived it.

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Religion renders it our duty to *abhor that which is evil*; and, on many occasions, to express our indignation openly against it. But the Apostle, with great propriety, describes the temper which he is recommending in such strong and general terms, as might guard us against that extreme to which we are naturally most prone, of rash and unjust suspicion. The virtue which he means to inculcate is that which is known by the name of Candour; a virtue, which, as soon as it is mentioned, every one will acknowledge to be essential to the character of a worthy man; a virtue which we seldom fail of ascribing to any person whom we seek to recommend to the esteem of others; but which, I am afraid, when we examine our own conduct in a religious view, is seldom the subject of inquiry.

It is necessary to observe, that true candour is altogether different from that guarded, inoffensive language, and that studied openness of behaviour, which we so frequently meet with among men of the world. Smiling very often, is the aspect, and smooth are the words of those who inwardly are the most ready to think evil of others. That candour which is a Christian virtue consists, not in fairness of speech, but in fairness of heart. It may want the blandishment of external courtesy, but supplies its place with humane and generous liberality of sentiment. Its manners are unaffected, and its professions cordial. Exempt, on one hand, from the dark jealousy of a suspicious mind; it is no less removed, on the other, from that early credulity which is imposed on every specious pretence. It is perfectly consistent with extensive knowledge of the world, and with due attention to our own safety. In that various intercourse which we are obliged to carry on with persons of every different character, suspicion, to a certain degree, is a necessary guard. It is only when it exceeds the bounds of prudent caution, that it degenerates into vice. There

is a proper mean between undistinguishing credulity, and universal jealousy, which a sound understanding discerns, and, which the man of candour studies to preserve.

He makes allowance for the mixture of evil with good, which is to be found in every human character. He expects none to be faultless; and he is unwilling to believe that there is any without some commendable quality. In the midst of many defects, he can discover a virtue. In the midst of personal resentment, he can be just to the merit of an enemy. He never lends an open ear to those defamatory reports and dark suggestions, which, among the tribes of the censorious, circulate with so much rapidity, and meet with such ready acceptance. He is not hasty to judge; and he requires full evidence before he will condemn. As long as an action can be ascribed to different motives, he holds it as no mark of sagacity to impute it always to the worst. Where there is just ground for doubt, he keeps his judgment undecided; and during the period of suspense, leans to the most charitable construction which an action can bear. When he must condemn he condemns with regret; and without those aggravations which the severity of others adds to the crime. He listens calmly to the apology of the offender, and readily admits every extenuating circumstance which equity can suggest. How much soever he may blame the principles of any sect or party, he never confounds under one general censure all who belongs to that party or sect. He charges them not with such consequences of their tenets, as they refuse and disavow. From one wrong opinion, he does not infer the subversion of all sound principles; nor from one bad action, conclude that all regard to conscience is overthrown. When he beholds the mote in his brother's eye, he remembers the beam in his own. He commiserates human frailty; and judges of others according to the principles by which he would think it reasonable

that they should judge of him. In a word, he views and actions in the clear sunshine of charity and good-nature; and not in that dark and fullen shade which jealousy and party spirit throw over all characters.—Such being in general the spirit of that charity which *thinketh no evil*, I proceed,

II. To recommend, by various arguments, this important branch of Christian virtue.

Let us begin with observing what a necessary requisite it is to the proper discharge of all the social duties. I need not spend time in showing that these hold a very high rank in the Christian system. The encomium which the Apostle in this chapter bestows upon charity, is alone sufficient to prove it. He places this grace at the head of all the gifts, and endowments, which can be possessed by man; and assures us that *though we had all faith so that we could remove mountains*, yet if we be destitute of charity, *it will profit us nothing*. Accordingly, *love, gentleness, meekness and long suffering*, are enumerated as distinguishing *fruits of the spirit of Christ*. But it is impossible for such virtues as these to find place in a breast, where the propensity to think evil of others is predominant. Charitable and candid thoughts of men are the necessary introduction to all good-will and kindness. They form, if we may speak so, the only climate in which love can grow up, and flourish. A suspicious temper checks in the bud every kind affection. It hardens the heart, and estranges man from man.

What friendship or gratitude can you expect from him, who views all your conduct with distrustful eyes, and ascribes every benefit you confer to artifice and stratagem? The utmost which you can hope from one of this character, is justice in his dealings; nor even that can you be assured of; as the suspicions to which he is a prey will afford him frequent pretexts for departing from truth, and for defending himself with
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the same arms which he conceives to be employed against him. Unhappy will they be who are joined with him by any close connexion; exposed to every malignant suspicion which arises in his own mind, and to every unjust suggestion which the malice of others may insinuate against them. That store of poison which is collected within him frequently throws out its venom on all who are within its reach. As a companion, he will be severe and satirical; as a friend, captious and dangerous; in his domestic sphere, harsh, jealous and irascible; in his civil capacity, seditious and turbulent, prone to impute the conduct of his superiors to improper motives, and upon loose information to condemn their conduct.

The contrary of all this may be expected from a candid temper. Whatever is amiable in manners, or useful in society, naturally and easily ingrafts itself upon it. Gentleness, humanity and compassion flow from it, as their native spring. Open and cheerful in itself, it diffuses cheerfulness and good-humour over all who are under its influence. It is the chief ground of mutual confidence and union among men. It prevents those animosities from arising which are the offspring of groundless prejudice; or, by its benign interposition, allays them when arisen. In the magistrate, it tempers justice with lenity. Among subjects it promotes good order and submission. It connects humanity with piety. For he who is not given to think evil of his fellow-creatures, will not be ready to censure the dispensations of his Creator. Whereas the same turn of mind which renders one jealous and unjust towards men, will incline him to be querulous and impious towards God.

In the second place, as a suspicious, uncharitable spirit is inconsistent with all social virtue and happiness, so, in itself, it is unreasonable and unjust. In order to form sound opinions concerning characters and actions, two things are especially requisite, in-

formation and impartiality. But such as are most forward to decide unfavourably, are commonly destitute of both. Instead of possessing, or even requiring full information, the grounds on which they proceed are frequently the most slight and frivolous. A tale, perhaps, which the idle have invented, the inquisitive have listened to, and the credulous have propagated; or a real incident which rumour, in carrying it along, has exaggerated and disguised, supplies them with materials of confident assertion, and decisive judgment. From an action they presently look into the heart, and infer the motive. This supposed motive, they conclude to be the ruling principle; and pronounce at once concerning the whole character.

Nothing can be more contrary both to equity and to sound reason, than such precipitate judgments. Any man who attends to what passes within himself, may easily discern what a complicated system the human character is, and what a variety of circumstances must be taken into the account, in order to estimate it truly. No single instance of conduct whatever, is sufficient to determine it. As from one worthy action, it were credulity, not charity, to conclude a person to be free from all vice; so from one which is censurable, it is perfectly unjust to infer that the author of it is without conscience, and without merit. Did you know all the attending circumstances, it might appear in an excusable light; nay, perhaps, under a commendable form. The motives of the actor may have been entirely different from those which you ascribed to him; impelled by bad design, he may have been prompted by conscience and mistaken principle. Admitting the action to have been in every view criminal, he may have been hurried into it through inadvertency and surprise. He may have sincerely repented; and the virtuous principle may have now regained its full vigour. Perhaps this was the corne
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of frailty ; the quarter on which he lay open to the incursions of temptation ; while the other avenues of his heart were firmly guarded by conscience.

No error is more palpable than to look for uniformity from human nature ; though it is commonly on this supposition that our general conclusions concerning character are formed. Mankind are consistent neither in good, nor in evil. In the present state of frailty, all is mixed and blended. The strongest contraries of piety and hypocrisy, of generosity and avarice, of truth and duplicity, often meet in one character. The purest human virtue is consistent with some vice ; and in the midst of much vice and disorder, amiable, nay respectable, qualities may be found. There are few cases in which we have ground to conclude that all goodness is lost. At the bottom of the character there may lie some sparks of piety and virtue, suppressed, but not extinguished ; which kept alive by the breath of heaven, and gathering strength in sacred from reflection, may, on the first favourable opening which is afforded them, be ready to break forth with splendour and force.—Placed, then, in a situation of so much uncertainty and darkness, were our knowledge of the hearts and characters of men is so limited, and our judgment to concerning them are so apt to err, what a continual call do we receive either to suspend our judgment, or to give it on the favourable side ? especially when we consider that, as through imperfect information we are unqualified for deciding soundly, so through want of impartiality we are often tempted to decide wrong. How much this reinforces the argument for candour, appear by considering,

In the third place, what the sources are of those severe and uncharitable opinions which we are so ready to form. Were the mind altogether free from prepossession and bias, it might avail itself to more advantage of the scanty knowledge which it possesses. But this is so far from being the case, that on every

side we are encumbered with prejudices, and warped by passions, which exert their influence in nothing more than in leading us to think evil of others. At all times we are justly said to *see through a glass, darkly*; but passion and prejudice, looking through a glass which distorts the form of the objects, make us also see falsely.

It is one of the misfortunes of our present situation, that some of the good dispositions of human nature are apt to betray us into frailties and vices. Thus, it often happens that the laudable attachment which we contract for the country, or the church, to which we belong, or for some political denomination under which we class ourselves, both confines our affections within too narrow a sphere, and gives rise to violent prejudices against such as come under an opposite description. Not contented with being in the right ourselves we must find all others in the wrong. We claim an exclusive possession of goodness and wisdom; and from approving warmly of those who join us, we proceed to condemn, with much acrimony, not the principles only, but the characters of those from whom we differ. Hence persons of well-disposed minds are too often, through the strength of partial good affection, involved in the crime of uncharitable judgment. They rashly extend to every individual the severe opinion which they have unwarrantably conceived of the whole body.—This man is of a party whose principles we reckon slavish; and therefore his whole sentiments are corrupted. That man belongs to a religious sect, which we are accustomed to deem bigotted; and therefore he is incapable of any generous or liberal thought. Another is connected with a sect, which we have been taught to account relaxed; and therefore he can have no sanctity.—Are these the judgments of candour and charity? Is true piety or virtue so very limited in its nature, as to be confined to such alone as see every thing with our eyes,
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and follow exactly the train of our ideas? Was there ever any great community so corrupt as not to include within it individuals of real worth?

Besides prepossessions of this nature, which sometimes mislead the honest mind, there are other, and much more culpable causes of uncharitable judgment. Pride is hurt and wounded by every excellence in which it can claim no share; and from eagerness to discover a blemish, rest, upon the slightest appearance of one, as a satisfying proof. When rivalry and competition concur with pride, our desire to espy defects increases, and, by consequence, the grounds of censure multiply. Where no opposition of interests takes place, envy has too much influence in warping the judgment of many. Even when none of these causes operate, the inward consciousness of depravity is sufficient to fill the mind with evil thoughts of others. Whence should a man so readily draw his opinions of men as from that character with which he is best acquainted, because it is his own? A person of low and base mind naturally imputes to others the sentiments which he finds congenial to himself; and is incredulous of every excellency which to him is totally unknown. He enjoys, besides, consolation in the thought that others are no better than himself; that his weaknesses and crimes are those of all men; and that such as appear most distinguished for virtue possess no real superiority, except greater dexterity in concealing their vices. Soothing themselves with this doctrine in secret, too many foster and strengthen the bad opinion which they entertain of all mankind. Rarely, if ever, have you ground to think well of that man's heart who is on every occasion given to think the worst of others. Let us observe,

IN the fourth place, that suitable to the sources whence a jealous and suspicious temper proceeds, are the effects which it produces in the world, the crimes and mischiefs with which it fills society. It possesses

this unhappy distinction beyond the other failings of the human heart, that while it impels men to violent deeds, it justifies to their own apprehension the excesses which they commit. Amidst the uproar of other bad passions, conscience acts as a restraining power. As soon as the tumult subsides, remorse exerts its influence, and renders the sinner sensible of the evil which he has done. But the uncharitable man is unfortunately set loose from any such check or controul. Through the insatiation of prejudice, his judgment is perverted; conscience is misled; *the light within him is turned into darkness*. Viewing the objects of his displeasure as evil men, he thinks himself entitled to give that displeasure full vent; and in committing the most inhuman actions, may sometimes imagine that he is doing good service to God.

The first fruits of an evil-thinking spirit are calumny and detraction, by which society is so often embroiled, and men are set at variance with one another. But did it proceed no further than censorious speech, the mischief would be less. Much greater and more serious evils frequently ensue. What direful effects, for instance, have often flowed from rash and ill-founded jealousy in private life? No sooner has one allowed that dæmon to take possession of his mind, than it perverts his understanding, and taints all his faculties. Haunting him by night and by day, bringing perpetually before him the odious and disquieting forms which it has raised up, it blackens every appearance to his view; gives to trifles which are in themselves light as air, the weight of full confirmation; till what was at first a dubious surmise, or a slight displeasure, rises at length into full belief and implacable fury. Hence, families torn with the most violent convulsions; the husband armed against the wife, the father against the son, the friend against the friend; the plan of treachery and assassination contrived, and the dagger plunged into the bosom of the

the innocent.—In public life, how often have kingdoms been shaken with all the violence of war and rebellion, from the unjust suspicions which subjects had conceived of their rulers; or the rash jealousy which princes had entertained of their people?—But it is in religious dissensions chiefly, that the mischievous power of uncharitable prejudice has displayed its full atrocity. Religion is always found to heighten every passion on which it acts, and to render every contest into which it enters, uncommonly ardent; because the objects which it presents are of such a nature as strongly to seize and engage the human mind. When zeal for their own principles has prompted men to view those of a different persuasion in the odious lights which bigotry suggests, every sentiment of humanity has too often been extinguished. The mild influence of that religion which breathes nothing but gentleness, has proved too feeble to restrain the violent and bloody hand of persecution; and the uncharitable spirit, raging among contending parties, has filled the world with such calamities and crimes as have brought disgrace on the Christian name.

Let us attend particularly to one awful instance of the guilt which men may contract, and of the ruin which they may bring upon themselves, through the want of fairness and candour. The nation of the Jews were always noted for a narrow and uncharitable spirit. When John the Baptist, and our blessed Lord, appeared among them, because the former was austere in his temper and retired in his life, they pronounced of him that he had an evil spirit: And because the latter was open and sociable in his manners, they held him to be destitute of that sanctity which became a prophet. Their prejudice against our Lord took its first rise from a most frivolous and contemptible cause: *Is not this the son of the carpenter? Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* When his miracles repelled this reproach, and sufficiently proved

the eminence of his character, still they fostered their prejudices by this most futile reasoning, *Have any of the rulers believed on him?* Obstinate in their attachment to a temporal Messiah, and continuing to view all our Saviour's conduct with an evil eye, when he conversed with bad men in order to reclaim them, they treated him as a *companion of publicans and sinners*. Because he disallowed their groundless traditions, they held him to be a breaker of the Sabbath, and a contemner of religion. Because he prophesied the destruction of their temple, they accused him of being an enemy to his own nation. Till at last, through their perpetual misconstruction of his actions, their passions became so inflamed as to make them cry out with one voice, *Away with this man to death, and give us Barabbas the robber*.—Viewing in this dreadful event the consequences of want of candour, let every man tremble to think evil rashly of his brother. No one can tell how far uncharitable prejudices may carry him in guilt, if he allows them to harbour and gather strength within his breast. The cloud which *rose from the sea, no bigger than a man's band*, may soon swell and spread, till it cover the whole horizon, and discharge with most destructive violence the gathered storm.

IN the fifth place, as a suspicious spirit is the source of so many crimes and calamities in the world, so it is the spring of certain misery to the person who indulges it. His friends will be few; and small will be his comfort in those whom he possesses. Believing others to be his enemies, he will of course make them such. Let his caution be ever so great, the asperity of his thoughts will often break out in his behaviour; and in return for suspecting and hating, he will incur suspicion and hatred. Besides the external evils which he draws upon himself, arising from alienated friendship, broken confidence, and open enmity; the suspicious temper itself is one of the worst evils which any
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man can suffer. *If in all fear there be torment*, how miserable must be his state who, by living in perpetual jealousy, lives in perpetual dread? Looking upon himself to be surrounded with spies, enemies, and designing men, he is a stranger to reliance and trust. He knows not to whom to open himself. He dresses his countenance in forced smiles, while his heart throbs within from apprehensions of secret treachery. Hence fretfulness and illhumour, disgust at the world and all the painful sensations of an irritated and emitted mind.

So numerous and great are the evils arising from a suspicious disposition, that of the two extremes it is more eligible to expose ourselves to occasional disadvantage from thinking too well of others, than to suffer continual misery by thinking always ill of them. It is better to be sometimes imposed upon, than never to trust. Safety is purchased at too dear a rate, when, in order to secure it, we are obliged to be always clad in armour, and to live in perpetual hostility with our fellows. This is, for the sake of living, to deprive ourselves of the comfort of life. The man of candour enjoys his situation, whatever it is, with cheerfulness and peace. Prudence directs his intercourse with the world; but no black suspicions haunt his hours of rest. Accustomed to view the characters of his neighbours in the most favourable light, he is like one who dwells amidst those beautiful scenes of nature, on which the eye rests with pleasure. Whereas the suspicious man, having his imagination filled with all the shocking forms of human falsehood, deceit, and treachery, resembles the traveller in the wilderness, who discerns no objects around him but what are either dreary or terrible; caverns that open, serpents that hiss, and beasts of prey that howl. Hence in him are verified those descriptions which the Spirit of God has given us of the misery of the wicked, *They shall have no peace, They shall be like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. The Lord shall give them a trembling*

trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind : And they shall fear day and night, and have none assurance of heart. I add,

In the sixth and last place, that there is nothing which exposes men in a more marked and direct manner to the displeasure of the Almighty, than a malignant and censorious spirit. I insist not now on the general denunciations of divine wrath against malice and hatred. Let us only consider under what particular description the Spirit of God brings this crime of uncharitable judgement. It is declared to be an impious invasion of the prerogative of God, to whom alone it belongs to search all hearts, and to determine concerning all characters. This privilege He often appropriates expressly to himself, on purpose to restrain the rashness of censure among men ; requiring us to leave the judging of others on Him, and to attend, each of us, to our own business and duty. *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? To his own master, he standeth or falleth. Judge nothing before the time ; until the Lord come, who shall make manifest the counsels of the heart.*

It deserves our most serious attention, that, in several passages of Scripture, the great Judge of the world is represented, at the day of final retribution, as proceeding upon this principle, of rendering to men according to the manner in which they have acted towards their brethren. *With the merciful, thou wilt show thyself merciful ; and with the froward, thou wilt show thyself froward. With what judgment ye judge ; ye shall be judged ; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measure to you again.* It is impossible to form an argument of more force than this, to restrain all severity of judgment among such as look forward to the tribunal of God. The argument extends not indeed so far, as to represent our acceptance with the Deity as entirely suspended upon the candour which we show in forming our sentiments
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of others. We know that other graces besides this are requisite in order to fit us for heaven; and that without piety towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, all our charity to men will be found defective and vain. But this we know also, that in the heart which is destitute of fairness and candour, the Spirit of God certainly dwells not; and that whatever appearances of religion the uncharitable man may assume, on him the Sovereign of the universe looks with no favour — Thou who art a man full of frailties, who standest in need, not merely of impartiality in thy divine Judge, but of indulgence and mercy; Thou who implorest daily his mercy from him, and prayest that he would *remember thou art dust*, and not be strict to *mark iniquity against thee*; darest thou, with those very prayers in thy mouth, proceed to judge without candour of thy brethren, and upon the slightest grounds to reprobate and condemn them? O thou hypocrite? (for by what other name can we call thee?) vain are all thy pretensions to piety. Ineffectual is every plea which thou canst form for mercy from heaven. The precedent which thou hast established against thyself is decisive. Thou hast dictated the sentence of thine own condemnation.

On the whole, it clearly appears that no part of the government of temper deserves attention more, than to keep our minds pure from uncharitable prejudices, and open to candour and humanity in judging of others. The worst consequences, both to ourselves and to society, follow from the opposite spirit. — Let us beware of encouraging a habit of suspicion, by forming too severe and harsh opinions concerning human nature in general. A great proportion of infirmity and corruption, doubtless, adheres to it; yet tempered also it is with various mixtures of virtue and good affection. Darkened as the divine image now is among mankind, it is not wholly effaced. Much piety and goodness may lie hidden in hearts that are unknown to us. Vice is glaring and loud. The crimes of the wicked

wicked make a noise in the world, and alarmed society. True worth is retired and modest, and requires particular situations to bring it forth to public notice. The prophet Elijah, in a time of prevailing corruption, imagined that all true religion had forsaken the land. *I, even I only*, saith he to the Lord, *am left to serve thee*. But the Almighty, who discerned what was concealed from his imperfect view, replied, *Yet have I left me seven thousand men in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal*.

The aged, and the unfortunate, who have toiled through and unsuccessful life with long experience of the falsehood and fraud of evil men, are apt to be the more severe in the opinions which they entertain of others, For such, their circumstances may be allowed to form some degree of apology. But if, in youth and prosperity, the same hard suspicious spirit prevail; if they who are beginning the career of life set out with all the scruples of distrust; If, before they have had reason to complain of the world, they betray the diffidence of a jealous, and the malignity of a censorious mind, sad is the presage which may thence be drawn of their future dishonour. From such, you have nothing to look for that shall be either engaging in private life, or respectable in public character. To youth it particularly belongs to be generous in sentiment, candid in opinion, undesigning in behaviour, open to the most favourable construction of actions and conduct. Throughout all the stages of life, candour and fairness is one of the most honourable distinctions of the human character. It is connected with magnanimity; it is justified by wisdom; it is suitable to the relation in which we stand to one another. But if reason and humanity be insufficient to restrain us from rash and uncharitable judgments, let that awful denunciation frequently resound in our ears, *He shall have judgment without mercy who hath shewed no mercy*.

SERMON

S E R M O N XXVI.

GENESIS xlv. 5. 8.

Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither ; for God did send me before you to preserve life.—So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.

IN this generous manner, Joseph frames an apology for the unnatural behaviour of his brethren. He extenuates the atrocity of their crime, by representing the happy effects which it had produced. He looks beyond all second causes ; and recognizes, in the wonderful events of his life, the hand of the Almighty.—No human character exhibited in the records of Scripture is more remarkable or instructive, than that of this patriarch. He is one whom we behold tried in all the vicissitudes of fortune ; from the condition of a slave, rising to be ruler of the land of Egypt and in every station acquiring, by his virtue and wisdom, favour with God and man. When overseer of Potiphar's house ; his fidelity was proved by strong temptations, which he honourably resisted. When thrown into prison by the artifice of a false woman, his integrity and prudence soon rendered him conspicuous, even in that dark mansion. When called into the presence of Pharaoh, the wise and extensive plan which he formed for saving the kingdom from the miseries of impending famine, justly raised him to a high station, wherein his abilities were eminently displayed in the public service. But in his whole history there is no circumstance so striking and interesting, as his behaviour to his brethren who had sold him

him into slavery. The moment in which he made himself known to them, that moment at which we are now to contemplate him, was the most critical one of his life, and the most decisive of his character: It is such as rarely occurs in the course of human events; and is calculated to draw the highest attention of all who are endowed with any degree of sensibility of heart. Let us consider the sentiments which Joseph utters in the text under two views, each of which is very instructive to all Christians. I. As a discovery of his cordial forgiveness of his brethren; and, II. as an instance of his dutiful attention to the Providence of God.

I. THE most cordial forgiveness is here displayed. I shall not capitulate all the preceding history respecting Joseph and his brethren; as it is well known by every one who has the least acquaintance with the sacred writings. From the whole tenour of the narration it appears, that though Joseph, upon the arrival of his brethren in Egypt, made himself strange to them, yet from the beginning he intended to discover himself; and studied so to conduct the discovery as might render the surprise of joy complete. For this end, by affected severity, he took measures for bringing down into Egypt all his father's children. They were now arrived there; and Benjamin among the rest, who was his younger brother by the same mother, and was particularly beloved by Joseph. Him he threatened to detain; and seemed willing to allow the rest to depart. This incident renewed their distress. They all knew their father's extreme anxiety about the safety of Benjamin, and with what difficulty he had yielded to his undertaking this journey. Should he be prevented from returning, they dreaded that grief would overpower the old man's spirits, and prove fatal to his life. Judah, therefore, who had particularly urged the necessity of Benjamin's accompanying his brothers, and had solemnly pledged him-
self

self to their father for his safe return, craved, upon this occasion, an audience of the governour; and gave him a full account of the circumstances of Jacob's family.

Nothing can be more interesting and pathetic than this discourse of Judah, as it is recorded in the preceding chapter. Little knowing to whom he spoke, he paints, in all the colours of simple and natural eloquence, the distressed situation of the aged patriarch, hastening to the close of life; long afflicted for the loss of a favourite son, whom he supposed to have been torn in pieces by a beast of prey; labouring now under anxious concern about his youngest son, the child of his old age, who alone was left alive of his mother, and whom nothing but the calamities of severe famine could have moved a tender father to send from home, and expose to the dangers of a foreign land. *If we bring him not back with us, we shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant our father, with sorrow, to the grave. I pray thee therefore let thy servant abide instead of the young man, a bondman to our lord. For how shall I go up to my father, and Benjamin not with me? lest I see the evil that shall come on my father.*

Upon this relation, Joseph could no longer restrain himself. 'The tender ideas of his father and his father's house, of his ancient home, his country and his kindred, of the distress of his family, and his own exaltation, all rushed too strongly upon his mind to bear any farther concealment. *He cried, cause every man to go out from me; and he wept aloud.* The tears which he shed were not the tears of grief. They were the burst of affection. They were the tender sensibilities of nature. Formerly he had been moved in the same manner, when he first saw his brethren before him. *His bowels yarned upon them; he sought for a place where to weep. He went into his chamber; and then washed his face, and returned to them.* At that period his ge-

nerous

nerous plans were not completed. But now, when there was no farther occasion for constraining himself, he gives free vent to the strong emotions of his heart. The first minister to the king of Egypt was not ashamed to shew, that he felt as a man, and a brother. *He wept aloud; and the Egyptians, and the house of the Pharaoh heard him.*

The first words, which his swelling heart allowed him to pronounce, are the most suitable to such an affecting situation which were ever uttered.—*I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?*—What could he, what ought he, in that impassioned moment, to have said more? This is the voice of nature herself, speaking her own language; and it penetrates the heart: No pomp of expression; no parade of kindness; but strong affection hastening to utter what it strongly felt. *His brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.* Their silence is a expressive of those emotions of repentance, and shame, which, on this amazing discovery, filled their breasts, and stopped their utterance, as the few words which Joseph speaks are expressive of the generous agitations which struggled for vent within him. No painter could seize a more striking moment for displaying the characteristical features of the human heart, than what is here presented. Never was there a situation of more tender and virtuous joy, on the one hand; nor, on the other, of more overwhelming confusion and conscious guilt. In the simple narration of the sacred historian, it is set before us with greater energy and higher effect, than if it had been wrought up with all the colouring of the most admired modern eloquence.

When Joseph had a little recovered himself from the first transports of emotion, he proceeds to explain his situation to his brethren, and to show them the beneficent purposes for which he conceived himself to be raised by Providence into power. The apology which he makes in the text for their former
cruelty

cruelty is uncommon and remarkable. *Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither ; for God did send me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither but God ; and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and Lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.* This apology was, in truth, no satisfactory excuse for their crime. For though the over-ruling providence of Heaven has so directed the course of events, as to render their bad intentions subservient to a happy issue ; yet the badness of the intention originated entirely from themselves. The envy and jealousy which they entertained against their brother, led them to the commission of an atrocious deed. The deed was voluntary ; the crime was all their own ; and the interposition of Providence in making unforeseen consequence follow from that crime, did not, exculpate them from guilt. It were an impious conclusion, that because God extracts good from our evil, we are not answerable for the evil which we perpetrate. *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempted he any man.* But the sentiment in the text is to be considered, as a colour which the generous humanity of Joseph prompted him to throw on the conduct of his brethren. He saw the confusion with which they were overwhelmed in his presence. He diverts their attention from the remembrance of a crime which was now wringing their hearts with anguish, by representing to them the happy effects which that crime had produced. He sets them free from all uneasiness on his account. He calls upon them to rejoice in his prosperity ; and instead of dwelling on a painful recollection of their own conduct, to join with him in acknowledging and adoring the hand of the Almighty.

How different is this amiable spirit which Joseph discovers, from that harsh and ostentatious superiority which

which too often accompanies the pretended forgiveness of injuries, among those who call themselves Christians ! They are ready to say that, for their part, they pardon the wrongs which have been done them ; they wish that the persons who have committed them may be able to forgive themselves ; they leave them to God and to their own conscience. By the severe suggestions which they throw out, they discover the inward bitterness of their spirit ; and artfully gratify resentment, at the time when they profess to exercise forgiveness. Whereas the great and good man whose character we now consider, effaces all memory of the crimes which he pardons. He seeks to alleviate the remorse of his brethren by an extenuation of their guilt ; and while he is preparing to make their circumstances comfortable, studies at the same time to render their minds easy and tranquil.

This was not merely a transient emotion with Joseph, owing to the first burst of affection on discovering himself to his brethren. We have a clear proof, from a remarkable transaction which passed many years after this period, of his disposition continuing the same to the end of life. It is recorded in the last chapter of this book, that when Jacob died, his sons began to be seized with fear concerning the treatment which they might receive from their brother. The guilty are always suspicious. Conscious of their own baseness, they are incapable of conceiving their magnanimity of others. They saw the bond which held the family together, now broken by their father's death. They dreaded that the resentment of Joseph against them had hitherto been only suppressed, or concealed. *They said among themselves, peradventure he will now hate us, and requite all the evil which we did unto him.* Under this apprehension, they first sent an humble message to deprecate his displeasure by the memory of their common father ; and then appearing in his presence, they fell down before his face, professing

professing themselves to be his servants, and praying him to forgive the trespass which they had committed against him. But no such hidden resentment as they dreaded had ever lurked in the soul of Joseph. On the contrary, when he beheld his brethren in this affecting situation, bereaved of their ancient protector, and reduced, as they imagined, to the necessity of holding up their hands to him for mercy, he was overpowered by a tide of tender emotions. *Joseph wept, while his brethren spake unto him.* These affectionate tears alone were sufficient to have ensured their forgiveness. But hastening also by words to dispel their alarms, he presently added, *Fear not ; for though ye thought evil against me, God ment it unto good. Now therefore fear ye not ; I will nourish you and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.*

Such was the last incident that is recorded in the life of this emiaent personage, than whom you will find few more distinguished by an assemblage of illustrious virtues ; in the lowest adversity, patient and faithful ; in the highest prosperity, beneficent and generous ; dutiful and affectionate, as a son ; kind forgiving, as a brother ; accomplished, as a statesman ; wise and provident, as a ruler of the land. In such a character you behold human nature possessing its highest honours. The sentiments which it inspires, tend to enoble our minds ; and to prevent their imbibing the spirit of those hard, interested, and self-seeking men with whom the world abounds.

THE striking example of forgiveness, which the text displays, ought frequently to occur to our thoughts, amidst the various occasions of provocation and offence which arise in our intercourse with the world. If one so worthy and amiable, in the days too of his youth and innocence, suffered such cruel treatment from his brothers, ought we to be surpris'd if, even from our nearest relations, we meet with un-justice

justice or ingratitude? Wrongs and injuries are, more or less, the portion of all. Like Death, they are an evil unavoidable. No station is so high, no power so great, no character so unblemished, as to exempt us from them. In the world, ungrateful men, false friends, and violent enemies abound. Every wise man ought to prepare himself for what he is to encounter, in passing through this thorny region. He is not to expect that he can *gather grapes from thistles*; nor to lose the government of his mind, because, in the midst of evil men, he is not allowed to remain, like a sacred and inviolable person, untouched and uninjured.

As this view of our situation ought to blunt the edge of passion and impatience, so the alleviating circumstances which reason will suggest, ought to mollify resentment. Think of the various constructions which the actions of men will bear. Consider how different the motives of him who hath given us offence, may have been from those which in the heat of passion we ascribe to him; how apt all men are to be seduced, by mistaken views of interest; and how little ground we have to complain if, upon a supposed interfering of interests, we suffer by others preferring their own to ours. Remember that no opinions which you form under the power of resentment can be depended upon as just; and that every one loads the intentions of his enemy with imaginary degrees of malice.

But admitting the injury you have received to be ever so atrocious in its nature, and aggravated in its circumstances; supposing it to be even parallel to that which Joseph suffered; look up, like him, to that divine government under which we are all placed. If forgiveness be a duty which we know God to have required under the most awful sanctions, dare we draw upon ourselves the merited vengeance of that superiour, to whose clemency we are obliged daily to
fly?

fly? When, with hard and unrelenting dispositions towards our brethren, we send up to Heaven prayers for mercy to ourselves, those prayers return like imprecations upon our heads; and our very devotions seal our condemnation.

The most plain and natural sentiments of equity concur with divine authority to enforce the duty which I now recommend. Let him who has never in his life done wrong, be allowed the privilege of remaining inexorable. But let such as are conscious of frailties and crimes, consider forgiveness as a debt which they owe to others. Common failings are the strongest lesson of mutual forbearance. Were this virtue unknown among men, order and comfort, peace and repose would be strangers to human life. Injuries retaliated according to the exorbitant measure which passion prescribes, would justify resentment in return. The injured person would be come the injurer; and thus wrongs, retaliations, and fresh injuries, would circulate in endless succession, till the world was rendered a field of blood. Of all the passions which invade the human breast, revenge is the most direful. When allowed to reign with full dominion, it is more than sufficient to poison the few pleasures which remain to man in his present state. How much soever a person may suffer from injustice, he is always in hazard of suffering more from the prosecution of revenge. The violence of an enemy cannot inflict what is equal to the torment he creates to himself, by means of the fierce and desperate passions which he allows to rage in his soul.

Those evil spirits who inhabit the regions of misery, are represented as delighting in revenge and cruelty, But all that is great and good in the universe, is on the side of clemency and mercy. The almighty Ruler of the world, though for ages offended by the unrighteousness, and insulted by the impiety of men, *is long in sufferings and slow to anger.* His Son, when
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he appeared in our nature, exhibited both in his life and his death, the most illustrious example of forgiveness which the world ever beheld. If you look into the history of mankind, you will find that in every age, those who have been respected as worthy, or admired as great have been distinguished for this virtue. Revenge dwells in little minds. A noble and magnanimous spirit is always superiour to it. It suffers not from the injuries of men those severe shocks which others feel. Collected within itself, it stands unmoved by their impotent assaults; and with generous pity, rather than with anger, looks down on their unworthy conduct. It has been truly said, that the greatest man on earth can no sooner commit an injury, than a good man can make himself greater, by forgiving it. Joseph, at the moment when we now contemplate him, had entirely under his power all those unnatural brethren who had been guilty towards him of the most cruel outrage which man could perpetrate. He could have retained them for ever in that Egyptian bondage to which they had once consigned him, and have gratified revenge by every accumulation of disgrace which despotic power enabled him to inflict. Had he acted this part, he might for a while have been soothed by the pleasures of his high station. But remorse, in the end, would have stung his soul. Cruelty would have rendered him unhappy within himself, as well as odious to others: And his name would have perished among the crowd of those contemptible statesmen, whose actions strain the annals of history. Whereas now, his character stands among the foremost in the ranks of spotless fame. His memory is blessed to all generations. His example continues to edify the world; and he himself shines in the celestial regions *as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.* Let us now,

II. CONSIDER the sentiment contained in the text,

text, not only as a discovery or cordial forgiveness, but as an expression of devout attention to the conduct of Providence. *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.* Remark how beautifully piety and humanity are, in this instance, connected together. As we are told of Cornelius, and good Centurion, that *his prayers and his alms*, his devotion and his good works, came up together *in memorial before God*, so here we perceive fraternal affection and religious reverence, mingling in one emotion within the patriarch's heart. In a person of low and vulgar mind, the sensations on such an occasion would have been extremely defferent. Looking back on the past events of his life, he would have ascribed all the adversity which he had suffered, to the perverse treatment of his brothers; and all the prosperity which he afterwards attained to his own good conduct and wisdom; and by consequence would have remained embittered against the instruments of the one, and filled with pride and self-sufficiency on account of the other. But the elevated and noble mind of Joseph rejected such unworthy sentiments. Contemplating the hand of God in all that had befallen him, he effaced the remembrance of those evil deeds which had produced his adversity; and for his prosperity he affected no praise to himself, but ascribed it entirely to the will of Heaven. Let us take notice that this is not the reflection of a private, retired man; whose situation might be supposed to favour such devout meditations. It is the reflection of one, who was leading a busy and a seducing life, in the midst of a court; the favourite of the greatest monarch who was then known in the world. Yet him you behold, amidst the submission and adulation which was paid to him, perserving the moderation and simplicity of a virtuous mind; and amidst the idolatry and false philosophy of the Egyptians, maintaining the principles of true religion, and giving glory to the God of Israel.

From this union of piety with humanity, which is so conspicuous in the sentiments of Joseph, there arises one very important instruction; That a devout regard to the hand of God in the various events of life tends to promote good dispositions and affections towards men. It will be found by those who attend to the workings of human nature, that a great proportion of those malignant passions which break out in the intercourse of men, arises from confining their attention wholly to second causes, and over-looking the first cause of all. Hence, they are insolent in prosperity, because they discern nothing higher than their own abilities; and in adversity they are peevish and unforgiving, because they have no object on which to fix their view, but the conduct of men who have acted as their enemies. They behold no plan of wisdom or goodness carried on throughout nature, which can allay the discomposure of their mind. As soon as their temper is ruffled, the world appears to them to be a continued scene of disasters and injuries, of confused events and of unreasonable men. Whereasto the pious man, the contemplation of the universe exhibits a very different spectacle. In the mist of seeming confusion he traces a principle of order; and by attention to that order, his mind is harmonized and calmed. He beholds a wise and righteous Governour presiding over all the commotions which are raised by the tumult of conflicting passions and interests; guiding, with imperceptible influence, the hand of the violent to beneficent purposes; accomplishing unexpected ends by the most improbable means; obliging the *wrath of men to praise him*; sometimes humbling the mighty, sometimes exalting the low; often *snaring the wicked in the devices which their hands have wrought*. Respectful acknowledgement of this divine government; controuls the disorders of inferiour passions. Reverence for the decrees of Heaven inspires patience and meditation.

deration. Trust in that perfect wisdom and goodness which directs all for the best, diminishes the shock which worldly disasters occasion. The irritation of passion and resentment, will always bear proportion to the agitation which we suffer from the changes of fortune. One who connects himself with nothing but second causes, partakes of the violence and irregularity of all the inferiour movements belonging to this great machine. He who refers all to God, dwells, if we may speak so in that higher sphere where motion begins; he is subject to fewer shocks and concussions, and is only carried along by the motion of the universe.

How can mildness or forgiveness gain place in the temper of that man who, on occasion of every calamity which he suffers from the ill usage of others, has no sanctuary within his own breast to which he can make retreat from their vexations; who is possessed of no principle which is of sufficient power to beardown the rising tide of peevish and angry passions? The violence of an enemy, or the ingratitude of a friend, the injustice of one man, and the treachery of another, perpetually dwell and rankle in his thoughts. The part which they have acted in bringing on his distress, is frequently more grating to him than the distress itself. Whereas he who in every event looks up to God, has always in his view a great and elevating object, which inspires him with magnanimity. His mind lies open to every relieving thought, and is inclin'd to every suggestion of generosity. He is disposed to say with Joseph, *it was not you that sent me hither, but God*; with David, *it is the Lord*; let him do what seemeth good in his eyes; and with a greater personage than either of these, *the cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?* Hence arises superiority to many of the ordinary provocations of the world. For he looks upon the whole of his present life as part of a great plan, which is car-

ried-on under the direction of Heaven. In this plan, he views men as acting their several parts, and contributing to his good or evil. But their parts he considers as subordinate ones; which, though they may justly merit his affection, and may occasionally call fourth his resentment, yet afford no proper foundation to violent or malignant passion. He looks upon bad men as only the rod with which the Almighty chastens; like the pestilence, the earthquake, or the storm. In the midst of their injustice and violence he can pity their blindness; and imitate our blessed Lord praying, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

S E R M O N XXVII.

2 KINGS viii. 12, 13.

And Hazael said, Why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel. Their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.

IN the days of Joram king of Israel flourished the prophet Elisha. His character was so eminent, and his fame so widely spread, that Benhadad the king of Syria though an idolater, sent to consult him concerning the issue of a distemper which threatened his life. The messenger employed on this occasion was Hazael, who appears to have been one of the princes,

princes, or chief men, of the Syrian court. Charged with rich gifts from the king, he presents himself before the prophet; and accosts him in terms of the highest respect. During the conference which they held together, Elisha fixed his eye stedfastly on the countenance of Hazael; and discerning, by a prophetic spirit, his future tyranny and cruelty, he could not contain himself from bursting into a flood of tears. When Hazael, in surprise, inquired into the cause of this sudden emotion, the prophet plainly informs him of the crimes and barbarities which he foresaw that hereafter he should commit. The soul of Hazael abhorred, at this time, the thoughts of cruelty. Uncorrupted, as yet, by ambition of greatness, his indignation arose at being thought capable of such savage actions as the prophet had mentioned; and, with much warmth, he replies, *But what? is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* Elisha makes no return but to point out a remarkable change which was to take place in his condition; *The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* In course of time, all that had been predicted came to pass. Hazael ascended the throne; and ambition took possession of his heart. *He smote the children of Israel in all their coasts. He oppressed them during all the days of King Jeboahaz;* and, from what is left on record of his actions, plainly appears to have proved what the prophet foresaw him to be, a man of violence, cruelty, and blood.

In this passage of history, an object is presented which deserves our serious attention. We behold a man who, in one state of life, could not look upon certain crimes without surprise and horror; who knew so little of himself as to believe it impossible for him ever to be concerned in committing them; that same man, by a change of condition, transformed in all his sentiments, and as he rose in greatness, rising also in guilt; till at last he completed that whole character

of iniquity which he once detested. Hence the following observations naturally arise. I. That to a mind not entirely corrupted, sentiments of abhorrence at guilt are natural. II. That notwithstanding those sentiments, the mind may be brought under the dominion of the vices which it had most abhorred. III. That this unhappy revolution is frequently owing to a change of men's external circumstances and condition in the world. These observations are to make the subject of the present discourse; and will lead us to such a view of human nature as, it is hoped, may be of general use.

I. SENTIMENTS of abhorrence at guilt are natural to the human mind. Huzael's reply to the prophet shews how strongly he felt them. *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* Is he, or can he ever be, so base and wretched as to perpetrate crimes, which would render him unworthy of bearing the name of a man? This is the voice of human nature, while it is not as yet hardened in iniquity. Some vices are indeed more odious to the mind than others. Providence has wisely pointed the sharpest edge of this natural aversion against the crimes which are of most pernicious and destructive nature; such as treachery, oppression and cruelty. But, in general, the distinction between moral good and evil is so strongly marked, as to accompany almost every vice with sensible disapprobation. Present to any man, even the most ignorant and untutored, an obvious instance of injustice, falsehood, or impiety; let him view it in a cool moment, when no passion blinds, and no interest warps him; and you will find that his mind immediately revolts against it, as shameful and base, nay as deserving punishment. Hence, in reasoning on the characters of others, however men may mistake as to facts, yet they generally praise and blame according to the principles of sound morality.

With respect to their own character a notorious partiality

partiality to generally misleads their judgement. But it is remarkable, that no sinner ever avows directly to himself that he has been guilty of gross and downright iniquity. Even when engaged by his passions in the commission of the greatest crimes, he always palliates them to his own mind by some extenuation or apology, some pretended necessity, or some borrowed colour of innocence. Such power the undeniable dignity of virtue, and the acknowledged turpitude of vice, possess over every human heart. These sentiments are the remaining impressions of that law, which was originally written on the mind of man. They are gleams of that light which once shone clear and strong within us, and which, though it be now greatly obscured, yet continues to shoot a feeble ray athwart the darkness of human nature. — But whatever sentiments of abhorrence at vice we may at any time entertain, we have no reason to build upon these a presumptuous confidence of our continuance in virtue. For the next instruction which the text suggests is,

II. THAT such is mans' ignorance of his own character, such the frailty of his nature, that he may one day become infamous for those very crimes which at present he holds in detestation. This observation is so well verified by the history of Hazael; and a thousand other instances might be brought to confirm it. Though there is nothing which every person ought to know so thoroughly as his own heart, yet from the conduct of men it appears, that there is nothing with which they are less acquainted. Always more prone to flatter themselves than desirous to discover the truth, they trust to their being possessed of every virtue which has not been put to the trial; and reckon themselves secure against every vice to which they have not hitherto been tempted. As long as their duty hangs in speculation, it appears so plain, and so eligible, that they cannot doubt of performing it. The suspicion never enters their mind, that in

the hour of speculation, and in the hour of practice, their sentiments may differ widely. Their present disposition they easily persuade themselves will ever continue the same ; and yet that disposition is changing with circumstances every moment.

The man who glows with the warm feelings of devotion, imagines it impossible for him to lose that sense of the divine goodness which at present melts his heart. He whom his friend has lately saved from ruin is confident that, if some trying emergency shall put his gratitude to proof, he will rather die than abandon his benefactor. He who lives happy and contented in frugal industry, wonders how any man can give himself up to dissolute pleasure. Were any of those persons informed by a superiour spirit, that the time was shortly to come when the one should prove an example of scandalous impiety, the other of treachery to his friend, and the third of all that extravagant luxury which disgraces a growing fortune ; each of them would testify as much surprise and abhorrence as Hazael did upon hearing the predictions of the prophet. Sincere they might very possibly be in their expressions of indignation ; for hypocrisy is not always to be charged on men whose conduct is inconsistent. Hazael was in earnest, when he resented with such ardour the imputation of cruelty. The Apostle Peter was sincere when he made the zealous profession, that though he should go to prison and to death with his master, he would never deny him. They were sincere ; that is, they spoke from the fulness of their hearts, and from the warmth of the present moment ; but they did not know themselves, as the events which followed plainly showed. So false to its principles, too frequently, is the heart of man ; so weak is the foundation of human virtue ; so much reason there is for what the gospel perpetually inculcates concerning the necessity of distrusting ourselves, and depending on divine aid. Mortifying, I
confess,

confess, is this view of human nature; yet proper to be attended to by all, in order to escape the most fatal dangers. For, merely through unguarded conduct, and from the want of this prudent suspicion of their own weakness, how many, after the most promising beginnings, have gradually apostatized from every principle of virtue, until, at last, it has become as difficult for one to believe that they ever had any love of goodness, as it would have been once to have persuaded themselves that they were to advance to such a height in wickedness?

IN such cases as I have described, what has become, it may be enquired, of those sentiments of abhorrence at guilt which were once felt so strongly? Are they totally erased? or, if in any degree they remain, how do such persons contrive to satisfy themselves in acting a part which their minds condemn? Here, there is a mystery of iniquity which requires to be unfolded. Latent and secret is the progress or corruption within the soul, the more latent the more dangerous is its growth. No man becomes of a sudden completely wicked. Guilt never shows its whole deformity at once; but by gradual acquaintance reconciles us to its appearance, and imperceptibly diffuses its poison thro' all the powers of the mind. Every man has some darling passion which generally affords the first introduction to vice. The irregular gratifications into which it occasionally seduces him, appear under the form of venial weaknesses; and are indulged, in the beginning, with scrupulousness and reserve. But by longer practice these restrain, weaken, and the power of habit grows. One vice brings in another to its aid. By a sort of natural affinity they connect and entwine themselves together; till their roots come to be spread wide and deep over all the soul. When guilt rises to be glaring, conscience endeavours to remonstrate. But conscience is a calm principle. Passion is loud and impetuous; and cre-

ates a tumult which drowns the voice of reason. It joins, besides, artifice to violence; and seduces at the same time that it impels. For it employs the understanding to impose upon the conscience. It devises reason and arguments to justify the corruptions of the heart. The common practice of the world is appealed to. Nice distinctions are made. Men are found to be circumstanced in so peculiar a manner, as to render certain actions excusable, if not blameless, which in a nother situation, it is confessed would have been criminal. By such a process as this, there is reason to believe that a great part of mankind advance from step to step in sin, partly hurried by passion, and partly blinded by self-deceit. without and just sense of the degree of guilt which they contract. By inveterate habits their judgment is, at length, perverted, and their moral feelings are deadened. They see now with other eyes; and can look without pain on evil actions which they formerly abhorred.

It is proper, however, to observe, that though our native sentiments of abhorrence at guilt may be so borne down, or so eluded as to lose their influence on conduct, yet those sentiments belonging originally to our frame, and being never totally eradicated from the soul, will still retain so much authority, as if not to reform, at least on some occasions, to chasten the sinner. It is only during a course of prosperity, that vice is able to carry on its delusions without disturbance. But, amidst the dark and thoughtful situations of life, conscience regains its rights; and pours the whole bitterness of remorse on his heart who has apostatized from his original principles. We may well believe that, before the end of his days, Hazael's first impressions would be made to return. In the hour of adversity, the remembrance of his conference with the venerable Prophet would sting his heart. Comparing the sentiments which, in those his better days, he felt, with the atrocious cruelties which he
had

had afterwards committed, all the honours of royalty would be unable to save him from the inward sense of baseness and infamy.

FROM this view which has been exhibited of the progress of corruption, and of the danger to which we are exposed of falling from principles which once appeared firmly established, let us receive useful admonition for our own conduct. *Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast like him that putteth it off.* Let no man place a rash and dangerous confidence in his virtue. *But let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* Never adventure on too near an approach to what is evil. Familiarize not yourselves with it, in the slightest instances, without fear. Listen with reverence to every reprehensions of conscience; and preserve the most quick and accurate sensibility to right and wrong. If ever your moral impressions begin to decay, and your natural abhorrence of guilt to lessen, you have ground to dread that the ruin of virtue is fast approaching. While you employ all the circumspection and vigilance which reason can suggest, let your prayers, at the same time, continually ascend to God for support and aid. Remember that from him *descended every good and perfect gift*; and that to him only it belongs to *keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.* I proceed now to the

III. OBSERVATION from the text, That the power which corruption acquires to pervert the original principles of men, is frequently owing to a change of their circumstances and condition in the world. How different was Hazael the messenger of Benhadad, from Hazael the king; he who started at the mention of cruelty, from him who waded in blood! Of this sad and surprising revolution, the Prophet emphatically assigns the cause in these few words. *The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.*

That

That crown, that fatal crown, which is to be set upon thy head, shall shed a malignant influence over thy nature; and shall produce that change in thy character which now thou canst not believe.—Whose experience of the world is so narrow, as not to furnish him with instances similar to this, in much humbler conditions of life? So great is the influence of a new situation of external fortune; such a different turn it gives to our temper and affections, to our views and desires, that no man can foretell what his character would prove, should Providence either raise or depress his circumstances in a remarkable degree, or throw him into some sphere of action widely different from that to which he has been accustomed in former life.

The seeds of various qualities, good and bad, lie in all our hearts. But until proper occasions ripen, and bring them forward, they lie there inactive and dead. They are covered up and concealed within the recesses of our nature: or, if they spring up at all, it is under such an appearance as is frequently mistaken, even by ourselves. Pride, for instance, in certain situations, has no opportunity of displaying itself, but as magnanimity, or sense of honour. Avarice appears as necessary and laudable œconomy. What in one station of life would discover itself to be cowardice and baseness of mind, passes in another for prudent circumspection. What in the fulness of power would prove to be cruelty and oppression, is reputed, in a subordinate rank, no more than the exercise of proper discipline. For a while, the man is known neither by the world, nor by himself, to be what he truly is. But bring him into a new situation of life, which accords with his predominant disposition; which strikes on certain latent qualities of his soul, and awakens them into action; and, as the leaves of a flower gradually unfold to the sun, so shall all his true character open full to view.

This

This may, in one light, be accounted not so much an alteration of character produced by a change of circumstances, as a discovery brought forth of the real character which formerly lay concealed. Yet, at the same time, it is true that the man himself undergoes a change. For opportunity being given for certain dispositions, which had been dormant, to exert themselves without restraint, they of course gather strength. By means of the ascendancy which they gain, other parts of the temper are borne down; and thus an alteration is made in the whole structure and system of the soul. He is a truly wise and good man who, through divine assistance, remains superiour to this influence of fortune on his character; who having once imbibed worthy sentiments, and established proper principles of action, continues constant to these, whatever his circumstances be; maintains, throughout all the changes of his life, one uniform and supported tenour of conduct; and what he abhorred as evil and wicked in the beginning of his days, continues to abhor to the end. But how rare is it to meet with this honourable consistency among men, while they are passing through the different stations and periods of life! When they are setting out in the world, before their minds have been greatly misled or debased, they glow with generous emotions, and look with contempt on what is sordid and guilty. But advancing farther in life, and inured by degrees to the crooked ways of men; pressing through the crowd, and the bustle of the world; obliged to contend with this man's craft, and that man's scorn; accustomed, sometimes, to conceal their sentiments, and often to stifle their feelings, they became at last hardened in heart, and familiar with corruption. Who would not drop a tear over this sad, but frequent fall of human probity and honour! Who is not humbled, when he beholds the refined sentiments and high principles on which we are so ready to value ourselves,

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ourselves, brought to such a shameful issue; and man, with all his boasted attainments of reason; discovered so often to be the creature of his external fortune, moulded and formed by the incidents of his life!

THE instance of Hazael's degeneracy leads us to reflect, in particular, on the dangers which arise from stations of power and greatness; especially, when the elevation of men to these has been rapid and sudden. Few have the strength of mind which is requisite for bearing such a change with temperance, and self-command. The respect which is paid to the great, and the scope which their condition affords for the indulgence of pleasure, are perilous circumstances to virtue. When men live among their equals, and are accustomed to encounter the hardships of life, they are of course reminded of their mutual dependence on each other, and of the dependence of all upon God. But when they are highly exalted above their fellows, they meet with few objects to awaken serious reflection, but with many to feed and inflame their passions. They are apt to separate their interest from that of all around them; to wrap themselves up in their vain grandeur; and in the lap of indolence and selfish pleasure, to acquire a cold indifference to the concerns even of those whom they call their friends. The fancied independence into which they are lifted up, is adverse to sentiments of piety, as well as of humanity, in their heart. *Taking the timbrel and the harp, and rejoicing at the sound of the organ, they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? or what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*

But we are not to imagine, that elevated stations in the world furnish the only formidable trials to which our virtue is exposed. It will be found, that we are liable to no fewer nor less dangerous temptations, from the opposite extreme of poverty and depression

depression. When men who have known better days are throne-down into abject situations of fortune, their spirits are broken and their tempers soured. Envy rankles in their breast at such as are more successful. The providence of Heaven is accused in secret murmurs; and the sense of misery is ready to punish them into atrocious crimes, in order to better their state. Among the inferiour classes of mankind, craft and dishonesty are too often found to prevail. Low and penurious circumstances depress the human powers. They deprive men of the proper means of knowledge and improvement; and where ignorance is gross, it is always in hazard of engendering profligacy.

Hence it has been, generally, the pinion of wise men in all ages, that there is a certain middle condition of life, equally remote from either of those extremes of fortune, which though it want not also its own dangers, yet is, on the whole, the state most favourable both to virtue and to happiness. For there, luxury and pride on the one hand, have not opportunity to enervate or intoxicate the mind, nor want and dependence on the other, to sink and debase it; there, all the native affections of the soul have the freest and fairest exercise, the equality of men is felt, friendships are formed, and improvements of every sort are pursued with most success; there, men are prompted to industry without being overcome by toil, and their powers called forth into exertion, without being either superseded by too much abundance, or baffled by insuperable difficulties; there, a mixture of comforts and of wants, at once awakens their gratitude to God, and reminds them of their dependence on his aid; and therefore, in this state, men seem to enjoy life to most advantage, and to be least exposed to the snares of vice. Such a condition is recorded, in the book of Proverbs, to have been the wish and choice of one who was eminent for wisdom, *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches.*

*es. Feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be
guil and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest
I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

FROM the whole view which we have now taken of the subject, we may, in the first place, learn the reasons for which a variety of conditions and ranks was established by Providence among mankind. This life is obviously intended to be a state of probation and trial. No trial of characters is requisite with respect to God, who sees what is in every heart, and perfectly knows what part each man would act, in all the possible situations of fortune. But on account of men themselves, and of the world around them, it was necessary that trial should take place, and a discrimination of characters be made; in order that true virtue might be separated from false appearances of it, and the justice of Heaven be displayed in its final retributions; in order that the failings of men might be so discovered to themselves, as to afford them proper instruction, and promote their amendment; and in order that their characters might be shown to the world in every point of view, which could furnish either examples for imitation, or admonitions of danger. The accomplishment of these important purposes required, that human life should not always proceed in one tierour; but that it should both be chequered with many revolutions, and diversified by a variety of employments and ranks; in passing through which, the touchstone might be applied to the characters of men, and their hidden virtues or vices explored. Hazael might have appeared in history with a degree of reputation to which he was not entitled, had he continued to act in a subordinate station. At bottom, he was false and unsound. When raised higher in life, the corruption of his heart discovered itself, and he is now held forth with deserved infamy, as a warning to succeeding ages.

IN the second place we learn, from what has been
said,

said, in the importance of attending with the utmost care to the choice which we make of our employment and condition in life. It has been shown, that our external situation frequently operates powerfully on our moral character; and by consequence that it is strictly connected, not only with our temporal welfare, but with our everlasting happiness or misery. He who might have passed unblamed and upright, thro' certain walks of life, by unhappily chusing a road where he meets with temptations too strong for his virtue, precipitates himself into shame here, and into endless ruin hereafter. Yet how often is the determination of this most important article left to the chance of accidental connections, or submitted to the option of youthful fancy and humour? When it is made the subject of serious deliberation, how seldom have they, on whom the decision of it depends, any further view than to dispose of one who is coming out into life, as that he may the soonest become rich, or, as it is expressed, make his way to most advantage in the world? Are there no other objects than this to be attended to, in fixing the plan of life? Are there no more sacred and important interests which deserve to be consulted?—You would not willingly place one for whose welfare you was interested, in a situation for which you were convinced that his abilities were unequal. These, therefore, you examine with care; and on them you rest the ground of your decision. Be persuaded that no abilities merely, but the turn of the temper and the heart, require to be examined with equal attention, in forming the plan of future establishment. Every one has some peculiar weakness, some predominant passion, which exposes him to temptations of one kind more than of another. Early this may be discerned to shoot; and from its first risings its future growth may be inferred. Anticipate its progress. Consider how it is likely to be affected, by succeeding occurrences in life. If you bring one whom you are
rearing

rearing up into a situation, where all the surrounding circumstances shall cherish and mature this fatal principle in his nature, you become, in a great measure, answerable for the consequences that follow. In vain you trust to his abilities and powers. Vice and corruption, when they have tainted the heart, are sufficient to overfet the greatest abilities. Nay, too frequently they turn them against the possessor; and render them the instruments of his more speedy ruin.

In the third place, we learn from the history which has been illustrated, never to judge of true happiness, merely from the degree of mens' advancement in the world. Alway betrayed by appearances, the multitude are caught by nothing so much as by the show and pomp of life. They think every one blest who is raised far above others in rank. From their early years they are taught to fix their views upon worldly elevation, as the ultimate object of their aims; and of all the sources of error in conduct, this is the most general.—Hazael on the throne of Syria would, doubtless, be more envied, and esteemed by the multitude a far happier man than, when yet a subject, he was employed by Benhadad to carry his message to Elisha. Yet, O Hazael! how much better had it been for thee never to have known the name or honour of a king, than to have purchased it at the expence of so much guilt; forfeiting thy first and best character; rushing into crimes which were once thine abhorrence and becoming a traitor to the native sentiments and dictates of thy heart! How fatal to thy repose proved that coveted purple, which was drenched by thee in so much innocent blood! How much more cheerful were thy days, and how much calmer thy nights, in the former periods of thy life, than, when placed on a throne, thy ears were invaded by day with the cries of the miserable whom thou hast ruined; and thy slumbers broken by night with the shocking remembrance of thy cruelties and crimes!—

Never

Never let us judge by the outside of things ; nor conclude a man to be happy, solely because he is encompassed with wealth or grandeur. Much misery often lurks where it is little suspected by the world. The material enquiries respecting felicity are, not what a man's external condition is, but with what disposition of mind he bears it ; whether he be corrupted or improved by it ; whether he conducts himself so as to be acceptable to God, and approved of by good men. For these are the circumstances which make the real and important distinctions among the conditions of men. The effects of these are to last for ever, when all worldly distinctions shall be forgotten.

In the fourth place, from all that has been said, we should learn never to be immoderately anxious about our external situation, but to submit our lot with cheerfulness to the disposal of Heaven. To make the best and most prudent arrangements which we can, respecting our condition in life, is matter of high duty. But let us remember, that all the plans which we form are precarious and uncertain. After the utmost precautions taken by human wisdom, no man can foresee the hidden dangers which may await him in that path of life on which he has pitched. Providence chuses for us much more wisely than we can chuse for ourselves ; and, from circumstances that appeared at first most unpromising and adverse, often brings forth in the issue both temporal and spiritual felicity. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow ?* When we consider the darkness of our present state, the embecility of human nature, and the doubtful and ambiguous value of all that we call prosperity, the exhortation of the Psalmist comes home with great force on every reflecting mind. *Commit thy way unto the Lord.*—Form the measures with produce ; but divest thyself of anxiety about the issue.

Instead

Instead of seeking to order thine own lot, acquiesce in the appointment of Heaven, and follow without hesitation the call of Providence, and of duty. In whatever situation of life God shall place thee, look up devoutly to Him for grace and assistance; and study to act the part assigned thee with a faithful and upright heart. Thus shalt thou have peace within thyself, while thy course is going on; and when it draws towards a close, with satisfaction thou shalt review thy conduct. For, after all the toils and labours of life, and all the vain struggles which we maintain for pre-eminence and distinction, we shall find at the conclusion of the whole scene, that *to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole of man.*

S E R M O N XXVIII.

ECCLESIASTES vii. 2, 3, 4.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

MANY of the maxims contained in this book of Ecclesiastes will appear strange sayings to the men of the world. But when they reflect on the character of him who delivers them, they cannot but admit that his tenets deserve a serious and attentive examination. For they are not the doctrines of a pedant, who, from an obscure retirement, declaims against pleasures which he never knew. They are not

not the investives of a disappointed man, who takes revenge upon the world, by satirizing those enjoyments, which he sought in vain to obtain. They are the conclusions of a great and prosperous prince, who had once given full scope to his desires; who was thoroughly acquainted with life in its most flattering scenes; and who now, reviewing all that he had enjoyed, delivers to us the result of long experience, and tried wisdom. None of his principles seem, at first view, more dubious and exceptionable than those which the text presents. To assert that sorrow is preferable to mirth, and the *house of mourning* to the *house of feasting*; to advise men to chuse mortification and sadness when it is in their power to indulge in joy, may appear harsh and unreasonable doctrines. They may, perhaps, be accounted enemies to the innocent enjoyment of life who give countenance to so severe a system, and thereby increase the gloom which already sits sufficiently heavy on the condition of man. But let this censure be suspended, until we examine with care into the spirit and meaning of the sentiments here delivered.

It is evident that the wise man does not prefer sorrow, upon its own account, to mirth; or represent sadness as a state more eligible than joy. He considers it in the light of discipline only. He views it with reference to an end. He compares it with certain improvements which he supposes it to produce; when *the heart is made better by the sadness of the countenance, and the living to lay to heart what is the end of all men*. Now, if great and lasting benefits are found to result from occasional sadness, these, sure, may be capable of giving it the preference to some fleeting sensations of joy. The means which he recommends in order to our obtaining those benefits are to be explained according to the principles of sound reason; and to be understood with those limitations which the eastern style, in delivering moral precepts

precepts, frequently requires. He bids us go to the house of mourning; but he does not command us to dwell there. When he prefers sorrow to laughter, he is not to be understood as prohibiting all mirth; as requiring us to wear a perpetual cloud on our brow, and to sequestrate ourselves from every cheerful entertainment of social life. Such an interpretation would be inconsistent with many other exhortations in his own writings, which recommend temperate and innocent joy. It would not suit with the proper discharge of the duties which belong to us as members of society; and would be most opposite to the goodness and benignity of our Creator. The true scope of his doctrine in this passage is, that there is a certain temper and state of heart, which is of far greater consequence to real happiness, than the habitual indulgence of giddy and thoughtless mirth; that for the attainment and cultivation of this temper, frequent returns of grave reflection are necessary; that, upon this account, it is profitable to give admission to those views of human distress which tend to awaken such reflection in the mind; and that thus, from the vicissitudes of sorrow, which we either experience in our own lot, or sympathize with in the lot of others, much wisdom and improvement may be derived. These are the sentiments which I propose at present to justify and recommend, as most suitable to the character of men and of Christians; and not in the least inconsistent with pleasure, rightly understood.

Among the variety of dispositions which are to be found in the world, some indeed requires less of this discipline than others. There are persons whose tender and delicate sensibility, either derived from nature, or brought on by repeated afflictions renders them too deeply susceptible of every mournful impression; whose spirits stand more in need of being supported and cheered, than of being saddened by the dark
views

views of human life. In such cases, we are commanded to *lift up the hands which hang down, and to confirm the feeble knees.* But this is far from being the common disposition of men. Their minds are in general inclined to levity, much more than to thoughtful melancholy; and their hearts more apt to be contracted and hardened, than to relate with too much felicity: I shall therefore endeavour to shew them, what bad inclinations their compliance with Solomon's advice would correct; what good dispositions with respect to God, their neighbours, and themselves, it would improve; and how, upon the whole, his doctrine is verified, that *by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.*

I BEGIN by observing, that the temper recommended in the text suits the present constitution of things in this world. Had man been destined for a course of undisturbed enjoyment, perpetual gaiety would then have corresponded to his state; and pen- sive though have been an unnatural intrusion. But in a state where all is chequered and mixed, where there is no prosperity without a reverse, and no joy without its attending griefs; where from the house of feasting all must, at one time or other, pass into the house of mourning, it were equally unnatural if no admission was given to grave reflection. The mind of man must be attempered to his condition. Providence, whose wisdom is conspicuous in all its works, has adjusted with exact proportion the inward powers to the outward state of every rational being. It has for this purpose implanted the serious and sympathetic feelings in our nature, that they might correspond with the vicissitudes of sorrow in our lot. He who endeavours to repel their influence, or to stifle them in un- seasonable mirth, acts a violent and unnatural part. He strives with vain efforts against the current of things; contradicts the intention of his Maker, and counteracts the original impulses of his own heart,

It is proper also to observe, that as *the sadness of the countenance* has, in our present situation, a proper and natural place ; so it is requisite to the true enjoyment of pleasure. Worldly and sensual men often remark not, till it be too late, that by the studied efforts of constant repetition, all their pleasures fail. They draw them off so close to the dregs, that they become insipid and nauseous. Hence even *in laughter their heart is sorrowful, and the end of their mirth is heaviness*. It is only the interposal of serious and thoughtful hours, that can give any lively sensations to the returns of joy. I speak not of those thoughtful hours, too well known to sinners which proceed from guilty remorse ; and which, instead of preparing for future pleasure, damp and sicken the moment of enjoyment ; but of those which take rise from the mind retreating into itself, and opening to the sentiments of religion and humanity. Such hours of virtuous sadness brighten the gleams of succeeding joy. They give to the temperate enjoyments of the pious and humane a refined and delicate relish, to which the hardened and insensible are entire strangers. For it will be found, that in proportion as the tender affections of the soul are kept awake, howmuch soever they may sometimes distress the heart, they preserve it open likewise to the most agreeable sensations. He who never knew the sorrows of friendship, never also knew its joys. He whose heart cannot relent in the hours of mourning, will, in the most social hour of the house of feasting, partake of no more than the lowest part of animal pleasure.—Having premised these observations, I proceed to point out the direct effects of a proper attention to the distresses of life upon our moral and religious character.

IN the first place, the house of mourning is calculated to give a proper check to our natural thoughtlessness and levity. The indolence of mankind, and their love of pleasure, spread through all characters

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and ranks some degree of aversion to what is grave and serious. They grasp at any object, either of business or amusement, which makes the present moment pass smoothly away; which carries their thoughts abroad, and saves them from the trouble of reflecting themselves. With too many, this passes into a habit of constant dissipation. If their fortune and rank allow them to indulge their inclinations, they devote themselves to the pursuit of amusement thro' all its different forms. The skillful arrangement of its successive scenes, and the preparatory study for shining in each, are the only exertions in which their understanding is employed. Such a mode of life may keep alive, for a while, a frivolous vivacity. It may improve men in some of those exterior accomplishments, which sparkle in the eyes of the giddy and the vain; but it must sink them in the esteem of all the wise. It renders them strangers to themselves, and useless, if not pernicious, to the world. They lose every manly principle. Their minds become relaxed and effeminate. All that is great or respectable in the human character is buried under a mass of trifles and follies.

If some measures ought to be taken for rescuing the mind from this disgraceful levity; if some principles must be acquired which may give more dignity and steadiness to conduct, where, I pray you, are these to be looked for? Not surely in the house of feasting, where every object flatters the senses, and strengthens the seductions to which we are already prone; where the spirit of dissipation circulates from heart to heart; and the children of folly mutually admire, and are admired. It is in the sober and serious house of mourning that the tide of vanity is made to turn, and a new direction given to the current of thought. When some affecting incident presents a strong discovery of the deceitfulness of all worldly joy, and rouses our sensibility to human woe; when we behold those

with

with whom we had lately mingled in the house of feasting, sunk by some of the sudden vicissitudes of life into the vale of misery; or when, in sad silence, we stand by the friend whom we had loved as our own soul, stretched on the bed of death; then is the season when the world begins to appear in a new light; when the heart opens to virtuous sentiments, and is led into that train of reflection which ought to direct life. He who before knew not what it was to commune with his heart on any serious subject, now puts the question to himself, for what purpose he was sent forth into this mortal, transitory state; what his fate is likely to be when it concludes; and what judgment he ought to form of those pleasures which amuse for a little, but which, he now sees, cannot save the heart from anguish in the evil day. Touched by the hand of thoughtful melancholy, that airy edifice of bliss which fancy had raised up for him, vanishes away. He beholds in the place of it, the lonely and barren desert, in which, surrounded with many a disagreeable object, he is left musing upon himself. The time which he has mis-spent, and the faculties which he has misemployed, his foolish levity and his criminal pursuits, all rise in painful prospect before him. That unknown state of existence into which, race after race, the children of men pass, strikes his mind with solemn awe. — Is there no course by which he can retrieve his past errors? Is there no superior power to which he can look up for aid? Is there no plan of conduct which, if it exempt him not from sorrow, can at least procure him consolation amidst the distressful exigencies of life? — Such meditations as these, suggested by the house of mourning, frequently produce a change on the whole character. They revive those sparks of goodness which were nearly quite extinguished in the dissipated mind, and give rise to principles of conduct more rational in themselves, and more suitable to the human state.

IN the second place, impressions of this nature not only produce moral seriousness, but awaken sentiments of piety, and bring men into the sanctuary of religion. One might, indeed, imagine that the blessings of a prosperous condition would prove the most natural incitements to devotion; and that when men were happy in themselves, and saw nothing but happiness around them, they could not fail greatly to acknowledge that God, who *giveth them all things richly to enjoy*. Yet such is their corruption, that they are never more ready to forget their benefactor, than when loaded with his benefits. The giver is concealed from their careless and inattentive view, by the cloud of his own gifts. When their life continues to flow in one smooth current, unruffled by any griefs; when they neither receive in their own circumstances, nor allow themselves to receive from the circumstance of others, any admonitions of human instability, they not only become regardless of Providence, but are in hazard of contemning it. Glorifying in their strength, and lifted up by the pride of life into supposed independence, that impious sentiment, if not uttered by the mouth, yet too often lurks in the hearts of many, during their flourishing periods, *What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?*

If such be the tendency of the house of feasting, how necessary is it that, by some change in their situation, men should be obliged to enter into the house of mourning, in order to recover a proper sense of their dependent state? It is there, when forsaken by the gaieties of the world, and left alone with God, that we are made to perceive how awful his government is; how easily human greatness bends before him; and how quickly all our designs and measures, at his interposal, vanish into nothing. There, when the countenance is sad, and the affections are softened by grief; when we

fit apart, involved in serious thought, looking down as from some eminence on those dark clouds that hang over the life of man, the arrogance of prosperity is humbled, and the heart melts under the impressions of religion. Formerly we were taught, but now we see, we feel, how much we stand in need of an Almighty protector, amidst the changes of this vain world. Our soul cleaves to him who *despises not, nor abhors the affliction of the afflicted*. Prayer flows forth of its own accord from the relating heart, that he may be our God, and the God of our friends in distress; that he may never forsake us while we are sojourning in this land of pilgrimage; may strengthen us under its calamities, and bring us hereafter to those habitations of rest, where we, and they whom we love, may be delivered from the trials which all are now doomed to endure. The discoveries of his mercy which he has made in the gospel of Christ, are viewed with joy, as so many rays of light sent down from above to dispel, in some degree, the surrounding gloom. A mediator and intercessor with the Sovereign of the Universe, appear comfortable names; and the resurrection of the just becomes the powerful cordial of grief. In such moments as these, which we may justly call happy moments, the soul participates of all the pleasures of devotion. It feels the power of religion to support and relieve. It is softened, without being broken. It is full, and it pours itself forth; pours itself forth, if we may be allowed to use the expression into the bosom of its merciful Creator.

In the third place, such serious sentiments produce the happiest effect upon our disposition towards our fellow-creators, as well as towards God. It is a common and just observation, that they who have lived always, in affluence and ease, strangers to the miseries of life, are liable to contract hardness of heart with respect to all the concerns of others. Wrapped up in themselves, and their own pleasures, they

they behold with indifference the most affecting scenes of distress. Habituated to indulge all their desires without controul, they become impatient of the least provocation or offence; and are ready to trample on their inferiours, as if they were creatures of a different species from themselves. Is this an amiable temper, or such as becomes a man? When appearing in others, do we not view it with much displeasure? When imputed to ourselves, can we avoid accounting it a severe reproach?

By the experience of distress, this arrogant insensibility of temper is most effectually corrected; as the remembrance of our own sufferings naturally prompts us to feel for others when they suffer. But if providence has been so kind as not to subject us to much of this discipline in our own lot, let us draw improvement from the harden lot of others. Let us sometimes step aside from the smooth and flowery paths in which we are permitted to walk, in order to view the toilsome march of our fellows through the thorny desert. By voluntarily going into the house of mourning; by yielding to the sentiments which it excites, and mingling our tears with those of the afflicted, we shall acquire that humane sensibility, which is one of the highest ornaments of the nature of man. Perceiving how much the common distresses of life place us all on a level, and render the high and the low, the rich and the poor, companions in misfortune and mortality, we shall learn to set no man at nought, and, least of any, our afflicted brother. Prejudices will be extinguished, and benevolence opened and enlarged, when looking around on the multitude of men, we consider them as a band of fellow-travellers in the valley of woe, where it ought to be the office of every one to alleviate, as much as possible, the common burden.—While the vain and the licentious are revelling in the midst of extravagance and riot, how little do they think of the e

scenes of sore distress which are going on at that moment throughout the world; multitudes struggling for a poor subsistence to support the wife and the children whom they love, and who look up to them with eager eyes for that bread which they can hardly procure; multitudes groaning under sickness in desolate cottages, untended and unmourned; many apparently in a better situation of life, pining away in secret with concealed griefs; families weeping over the beloved friends whom they have lost, or, in all the bitterness of anguish, bidding those who are just expiring the last adieu!

May we not appeal to the heart of every good man, nay almost to the heart of every man who has not de vested himself of his natural feelings, whether the admission of such views of human life might not, sometimes at least, furnish a more worthy employment to the mind than that *mirth of fools*, which Solomon compares to *the crackling of thorns under a pot*; the transient burst of unmeaning joy; the empty explosion of giddiness and levity? Those sallies of jollity in the house of feasting are often forced from a troubled mind; like flashes from the black cloud, which, after a momentary effulgence, are succeeded by thicker darkness. Whereas compassionate affections, even at the time when they draw tears from our eyes for human misery, convey satisfaction to the heart. The gracious appointment of Heaven has ordained that sympathetic pains should always be accompanied with a certain degree of pleasure; on purpose that we might be more interested in the case of the distressed, and that by this mysterious bond, man might be linked closer to man. The inward satisfaction which belongs to the compassionate affections is, at the same time, heightened by the approbation which they receive from our reason; and by the consciousness which they afford us of feeling what men and Christians ought to feel.

In the fourth place, the disposition recommended in the text, not only improves us in piety and humanity, but likewise assists us in self-government, and the due moderation of our desires. The house of mourning is the school of temperance and sobriety. Every wise man will find it for his interest to enter into it sometimes of his own accord, lest otherwise he be compelled to take up his dwelling there. Seasonable interruptions of our pleasures are necessary to their prolongation. For, continued scenes of luxury and indulgence hasten to a melancholy issue. The house of feasting too often becomes an avenue to the house of mourning. Short, to the licentious, is the interval between them; and speedy the transition from the one to the other.

But supposing that, by prudent management, the man of pleasure could avoid the pernicious effects which intemperance and dissoluteness are likely to produce on their health, or their fortune, can they also prevent those disorders which such habits will introduce into their minds? Can they escape that wrath of the Almighty, which will infallibly pursue them for their sins both here and hereafter? For whence, so much as from the unchecked pursuit of pleasure, do all those crimes arise which stain the characters of men with the deepest guilt, and expose them to the severest judgements of Heaven? Whence, then, is the corrective of those mischiefs to be sought, but from such a discipline as shall moderate that intemperate admiration of the world which gave raise to the evil? By repairing sometimes to the house of mourning, you would chasten the looseness of fancy, abate the eagerness of passion, and afford scope to reason for exerting her restraining powers. You would behold this world stripped of its false colours, and reduce to its proper level. Many an important instruction you would receive from the humiliation of the proud, the mortification of the vain; and the sufferings of

the voluptuous, which you would see exemplified before you, in the chambers of sorrow, of sickness, and of death. You would then be taught to rejoice as though you rejoiced not, and to weep as though you weeped not; that is, neither in joy, nor in grief, to run to excess; but to use this world so as not to abuse it; contemplating the fashion thereof as passing away.

Moreover, you would there learn the important lesson of suiting your mind, before-hand, to what you had reason to expect from the world; a lesson too seldom studied by mankind, and to the neglect of which, much of their misery, and much of their guilt is to be charged. By turning away their eyes from the dark side of life; by looking at the world only in one light, and that a flattering one, they form their measures on a false plan, and are necessarily deceived and betrayed. Hence, the vexation of succeeding disappointment and blasted hope. Hence the criminal impatience of life, and their bitter accusations of God and man; when, in truth, they have reason to accuse only their own folly.—Thou who wouldst act like a wise man, and build thy house on a rock, and not on the sand, contemplate human life not only in the sunshine, but in the shade. Frequent the house of mourning, as well as the house of mirth. Study the nature of that state in which thou art placed; and balance its joys with its sorrows. Thou seest that the cup which is held forth to the whole human race, is mixed. Of its bitter ingredients, expect that thou art to drink thy portion. Thou seest the storm hovering every where in the clouds around thee. Be not surprised if on thy head it shall break. Lower therefore, thy sails. Dismiss thy florid hopes; and come forth prepared either to act or to suffer, according as Heaven shall decree. Thus shalt thou be excited to take the properest measures for defence, by endeavouring to secure an interest in His favour, who, in the time of trouble, can bide thee in his pavillion.

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Thy mind shall adjust itself to follow the order of his providence. Thou shalt be enabled, with equanimity and steadiness, to hold thy course through life. Finally,

IN the fifth place, by accustoming ourselves to such serious views of life, our excessive fondness for life itself will be moderate, and our minds gradually formed to wish and to long for a better world. If we know that our continuance here is to be short, and that we are intended by our Maker for a more lasting state, and for employments of a nature altogether different from those which now occupy the busy, or amuse the vain, we must surely be convinced, that it is of the highest consequence to prepare ourselves for so important a change. This view of our duty is frequently held up to us in the sacred writings; and hence religion becomes, though not a morose, yet a grave and solemn principle, calling off the attention of men from light pursuits, to those which are of eternal moment. *What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul; if he shall lead a life of thoughtless mirth on earth, and exclude himself from eternal felicity in Heaven?* Worldly affection, and sensual pleasure, depress all our higher powers. They form an unnatural union between the human soul and this earth, which was only designed for its temporary abode. They attach itself too strongly to objects from which it must shortly part. They alienate its desires from God and heaven, and deject it with slavish and unmanly fears of death. Whereas, by the discipline of religious seriousness, it is gradually loosened from the fetters of sense. Assisted to discover the vanity of this world, it rises above it; and in the hours of sober thought, cultivates connection with those divine and immortal objects, among which it is designed to dwell.

ENOUGH has now been said to convince any thinking person of the justice, and reasonableness, of

the maxims in the text ; and to show, that, on various occasions, *sorrow may be better than laughter*. Wouldst thou acquire the habit of recollection, and fix the principles of thy conduct ; wouldst thou be led up to thy Creator and Redeemer, and be formed to sentiments of piety and devotion ; wouldst thou be acquainted with those mild and tender affections which delight the compassionate and humane ; wouldst thou have the power of sensual appetites tamed and corrected, and thy soul raised above the ignoble love of life, and fear of death ? Go, my brother, go—not to scenes of pleasure and riot, not to the house of feasting and mirth—but to the silent house of mourning ; and adventure to dwell for a while among objects that will soften thy heart. Contemplate the lifeless remains of what once was fair and flourishing. Bring home to thyself the vicissitudes of life. Recal the remembrance of the friend, the parent, or the child, whom thou tenderly lovest. Look back on the days of former years ; and think on the companions of thy youth, who now sleep in the dust. Let the vanity, the mutability, and the sorrows of the human estate, rise in full prospect before thee ; and though thy countenance may be made sad, thy heart shall be made better. This sadness, though for the present it dejects, yet shall in the end fortify thy spirit ; inspiring thee with such sentiments, and prompting such resolutions, as shall enable thee to enjoy, with more real advantage, the rest of life. Dispositions of this nature form one part of the character of those *mourners* whom our Saviour hath pronounced *blessed* ; and of those to whom it is promised, that *sowing in tears they shall reap in joy*. A great difference there is between being serious and melancholy ; and a melancholy too there is of that kind which deserves to be sometimes indulged.

Religion hath, on the whole, provided for every good man abundant materials of consolation and relief.
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How dark soever the present face of nature may appear, it dispels the darkness, when it brings into view the entire system of things, and extends our survey to the whole kingdom of God. It represents what we now behold as only a part, and a small part, of the general order. It assures us, that though here, for wise ends, misery and sorrow are permitted to have place, these temporary evils shall, in the end, advance the happiness of all who love God, and are faithful to their duty. It shows them this mixed and confused scene vanishing by degrees away, and preparing the introduction of that state, where the house of mourning shall be shut up for ever; where no tears are seen, and no groans heard; where no hopes are frustrated, and no virtuous connections dissolved; but where, under the light of the divine countenance, goodness shall flourish in perpetual felicity. Thus, though religion may occasionally chasten our mirth with sadness of countenance, yet under that sadness it allows not the hearts of good men to sink. It calls upon them to rejoice, *because the Lord reigneth who is their rock and the most high God who is their Redeemer.* Reason likewise joins her voice with that of religion; forbidding us to make peevish and unreasonable complaints of human life, or injuriously to ascribe to it more evil than it contains. Mixed as the present state is, she pronounces, that generally, if not always, there is more happiness than misery, more pleasure than pain, in the condition of man.

S E R M O N XXIX.

PSALM lxxvi. 10.

Surely, the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

THIS Psalm appears to have been composed on occasion of some remarkable deliverance obtained by the Jewish nation. It is generally understood to have been written in the reign of Hezekiah, and to refer to the formidable invasion of Judæa by Sennacherib; when the angel of the Lord, in one night, discomfited the whole Assyrian host, and smote them with sudden destruction. To this interposition of the divine arm, those expression in the context may naturally be applied; *Then brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle. The stout-hearted are spoiled; they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their bands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and the horse are cast into a dead sleep.* In the text, we have the wise and religious reflection of the Psalmist upon the violent designs which had been carried on by the enemies of his country, and upon the issue to which Providence had brought them. *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee.* By the wrath of man, we are to understand all that the impetuosity of human passions can devise or execute; the projects of ambition and resentment, the rage of persecution, the fury of war; the disorders which violence produces in private life, and the public commotions which it excites in the world. All these shall praise God, not with their intention and design, nor by their native

native tendency; but by those wise and good purposes, which his providence makes them accomplish; from their poison extracting health, and converting things which in themselves are pernicious, into instruments of his glory, and of public benefit: So that, though *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*, it is nevertheless forced and compelled to minister to his praise. The Psalmist adds, *the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain*; that is, God will allow scope to the wrath of man as far as it answers his good purposes, and is subservient to his praise; the rest of it shall be cured and bound up. When it would attempt to go beyond its prescribed limit, he says to it, as to the waters of the ocean, *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed*.

All this shall be fully verified and declared by the last issue of things; when we shall be able more clearly to trace the divine administration through its several steps, by seeing the consummation of the whole. In some cases, it may be reserved for this period, to unfold the mysterious wisdom of Heaven. But in general, as much of the divine conduct is at present manifest, as gives just ground for the assertion in the text. In the sequel of this discourse, I shall endeavour to illustrate and confirm it. I shall show in what manner the wrath of man is made to praise the power, the wisdom, the justice, and the goodness of God.

I BEGIN with this observation, That in order to accomplish the great purposes carried on by the Government of the Universe, it is necessary that the divine perfections be displayed before mankind, in a sensible and striking manner. We are not to conceive the Supreme Being as hereby seeking praise to himself, from a principle of ostentation or vain glory. Independent and self-sufficient, he rests in the enjoyment of his own beatitude. His praise consists in the general order and welfare of his creation. This end

cannot be attained, unless mankind be made to feel the subjection under which they are pleased. They must be taught to admire and adore their sovereign. They must be overawed by the view of a high hand, which can at pleasure controul their actions, and render them subservient to purposes which they neither foresaw nor intended. Hence the propriety of God's making *the wrath of man to praise him*. We easily conceive in what manner the heavens and the earth are said to praise God; as they are standing monuments of that supreme perfection which is displayed in their creation. The virtues of good men obviously praise him, by exhibiting his image, and reflecting back his glory. But when even the vices and inordinate passions of bad men are made to praise him, in consequence of the useful purposes which they are compelled to accomplish, this, in a particular manner, distinguishes and signalizes a divine hand; this opens a more wonderful prospect of the administration of Heaven, that if all its subjects had been loyal and willingly obedient, and the course of human affairs had proceeded in a quiet and regular tenour.

I. *THE wrath of man* redounds to the praise of divine power. It brings it forth with full and awful lustre, to the view of mankind. To reign with sovereign command amidst the most turbulent and disordered state of things, both in the natural and moral world, is the peculiar glory of omnipotence. Hence God is described in Scripture as *sitting on the flood, riding on the wings of the wind, dwelling in the darkness and the tempest*; that is, making the most violent powers in the universe minister to his will, giving them scope or restraining them, according as suits the purposes of his dominion. As *he stills, at his pleasure, the raging of the seas, and the noise of their waves*, in like manner, *he stills the tumults of the people*. When the passions of men are most inflamed, and their designs just ripe for bursting into execution, often,

often, by some unexpected interposition, he calls upon the world to observe, that there is one higher than the highest on earth, who can frustrate their devices in a moment, and command *the earth to be still before him*. Proud fleets, destined to carry destruction to neighbouring kingdoms, may cover the ocean. He blows with his wind, and they are scattered. Mighty armies may go forth to the field in all the glory of human strength; but the issues of battle are with him. He suspends on high the invisible balance which weighs the fate of nations. According as the scale inclines, he gives to some slight event the power of deciding the contest. He clouds the sky with darkness, or opens the windows of heaven to let forth their flood. He defeats the hearts of the brave with sudden terror, and renders the hands of the strong weak and unperforming, at the critical moment. A thousand unseen ministers stand ready to be the instruments of his power, in humbling the pride, and checking the efforts of the wrath of man. Thus, in the instance of haughty Sennacherib, and that boasted tempest of wrath which he threatened to pour upon all the Jewish nation; *I will put my bow, says the Almighty, in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest*. In that night the destroying angel smote the host, and he departed with shame of face to his own land. *When the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing; when the kings of the earth set themselves, and its rulers take counsel together; He that sitteth in the Heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.*

II. THE wrath of man is made to praise the wisdom as well as the power of God. Nothing displays more remarkably the admirable counsel of heaven, than its arranging the train of events in such a manner, that the unruly passions of the wicked shall contribute to overthrow their own designs. History abounds with examples of their being rendered
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the unconscious ministers of Providence, to accomplish purposes directly opposite to those which they had in view. Thus the cruelty of the sons of Jacob, in pursuing the destruction of their brother Joseph, became the means of effecting his high advancement. Thus the wrath of Pharaoh against the Israelites, and his unjust attempts to detain them in bondage, proved the occasion of bringing them forth from the land of slavery, with signal marks of the favour of Heaven. Thus the inhuman plan which Haman had formed for ruining Mordecai, and extirpating the whole Jewish nation, paved the way for Mordecai's high promotion, and for the triumph of the Jews over all their enemies.

After this manner the Almighty *snareth the wicked in the works of their hands*; and erects his own counsel upon the ruin of theirs. Those events which, viewed apart, appear as spots in the divine administration, when considered in connection with all their consequences, are often found to give it additional lustre. The beauty and magnificence of the universe are much heightened, by its being an extensive and complicated system; in which a variety of springs are made to play, and a multitude of different movements are, with most admirable art, regulated and kept in order. Interfering interests, and jarring passions, are in such a manner ballanced against one another; such proper checks are placed on the violence of human pursuits; and the *wrath of man* is made so to hold its course, that how opposite soever the several motions seem to be, yet they concur and meet at last in one direction. While, among the multitudes that dwell on the face of the earth, some are submissive to the divine authority; some rise up in rebellion against it; others, absorbed in their pleasures and pursuits, are totally inattentive to it; they are all so moved by an imperceptible influence from above, that the zeal of the dutiful, the wrath of the rebellious

rebellious, and the indifference of the careless, contribute finally to the glory of God. All are governed in such a way as suits their powers, and is consistent with rational freedom, yet all are subjected to the necessity of fulfilling the eternal purposes of Heaven. This depth of divine wisdom in the administration of the universe, exceeds all human comprehension, and affords everlasting subject of adoration and praise.

III. *THE wrath of men* praises the justice of God, by being employed as the instrument of inflicting punishment upon sinners. Did bad men trace the course of events in their life with attentive eye, they might easily discover the greatest part of the disasters which they suffer to be brought upon them by their ungoverned passions. The succession of causes and effects is so contrived by Providence, that the wrath which they meant to pour forth on others, frequently recoils by its effects, upon themselves. But supposing them to escape those external mischiefs which violent passions naturally occasion, they cannot evade the internal misery which they produce. The constitution of things is framed with such profound wisdom, that the divine law, is in every event, executed themselves against the sinner, and carry their sanction in their own bosom. The supreme Being has no occasion to unlock the prisons of the deep, or to call down the thunder from heaven, in order to punish the *wrath of man*. He carries on the administration of justice with more simplicity, and dignity. It is sufficient that he allow those fierce passions which render bad men the disturbers of others, to operate on their own hearts. He delivers them up to themselves, and they become their own tormentors. Before the world they may disguise their sufferings; but it is well known, that to be inwardly torn with dispute, revenge and wrathful passions, is the most intense of all misery. In thus connecting the punishment with the crime, making

king their own wickedness to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them, the avenging hand of a righteous Governour is conspicuous; and thus the observation of the Psalmist is fully verified; *the wicked have drawn out their sword and bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy; but their sword shall enter into their own heart.*

The wrath of man also praises the justice of God in the punishment of other criminals, as well as of the wrathful themselves. Ambitious and lawless men are let loose upon each other, that without any supernatural interposition, they may fulfil the just vengeance of heaven in their mutual destruction. They may occasionally be cemented together by conspiracy against the just; but as no firm nor lasting bond, can unite them, they become at last the prey of mutual jealousy, strife and fraud. For a time they may go on, and seem to prosper. The justice of Heaven may appear to slumber; but it is awake; and only waits till the measure of their iniquity be full. God represents himself in Scripture as sometimes permitting wickedness to arise to an overgrown height, on purpose that its ruin may be greater, and more exemplary. He says to the tyrant of Egypt, *that for this cause he had raised him up*, that is, had allowed him to prosper and be exalted, *that he might show in him his power; and that his name might be declared throughout all the earth.* The divine administration is glorified in the punishment contrived for the workers of iniquity, as well as in the reward prepared for the righteous. *This is the purpose which the Lord hath purposed upon all the earth; and this is the hand that is stretched forth over all the nations.*

IV. THE wrath of man is made to praise the goodness of God. This is the most unexpected of its effects; and therefore requires to be the most fully illustrated. All the operations of the government of the Deity may be ultimately resolved into goodness.

His

His power, and wisdom, and justice, all conduce to general happiness and order. Among the means which he uses for accomplishing this end, it will be found that the wrath of man, through his over-ruling direction, possesses a considerable place,

First, it is employed by God as an useful instrument of discipline and correction to the virtuous. The storms which ambition and pride raise among mankind, he permits with the same intention that he sends forth tempests among the elements; to clear the atmosphere of noxious vapours, and to purify it from that corruption which all things contract by too much rest. When wicked men prevail in their designs, and exercise the power which they have gained with a heavy and oppressive hand, the virtuous are apt to exclaim, in bitterness of soul, Where is the Lord? and where the sceptre of righteousness and truth? *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? or doth he indeed see, and is there knowledge in the most high?* Their oppressors are, in truth, no more than the ministers of God to them for good. He sees that they stand in need of correction, and therefore raises up enemies against them, in order to cure the intemperance of prosperity; and to produce, in the serious hours of affliction, proper reflections upon their duty, and their past errors.

In this light the disturbers of the earth are often represented in Scripture; as scourges in the hand of God, employed to inflict chastisement upon a degenerating people. They are commissioned for the execution of righteous and wise purposes, concealed from themselves; and when their commission is fulfilled, they are recalled, and destroyed. Of this we have a remarkable example in the use which God made of the king of Assyria, with respect to the people of Israel. *I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey.*

Howbeit

Howbeit, he meaneth not so; neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few. Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. In vain, then, doth the wrath of man lift itself up against God. He saith, by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. Shall the ax boast itself against him that beweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? All things, whether they will it or not, must work together for good to them that love God. The wrath of man, among the rest, fills up the place assigned to it by the ordination of Heaven. The violent enemy, the proud conqueror, and the oppressive tyrant possess only the same station with the famine, the pestilence, and the flood. Their triumphs are on more than the accomplishment of God's correction; and the remainder of their wrath shall be restrain.

SECONDLY, God makes the wrath of man contribute to the benefit of the virtuous, by rendering it the means of improving and signalizing their graces; and of raising them, thereby, to higher honour and glory. Had human affairs proceeded in an orderly train, and no opposition been made to religion and virtue by the violence of the wicked, what room would have been left for some of the highest and most generous exertions of the soul of man? How many shining examples of fortitude, constancy, and patience, would have been lost to the world? What a field of virtues peculiar to a state of discipline had lain uncultivated? Spirits of a higher order possess a state of established virtue, that stands in need of no such trials and improvements. But to us, who are only under education for such a state, it belongs to pass through the furnace, that our souls may be tried,

ed, refined, and brightened. We must stand the conflict, that we may be graced and crowned, as conquerors. The *wrath of man* opens the field to glory; call us forth to the most distinguished exercise of active virtue, and forms us to all those suffering graces which are among the highest ornaments of the human soul. It is thus, that the illustrious band of true patriots and heroes, of confessors and martyrs, have been set forth to the admiration of all ages, as *lights of the world*; while the rage and fury of enemies, instead of bearing them down, have only served to exalt and dignify them more.

THIRDLY, the *wrath of man* is often made to advance the temporal prosperity of the righteous. The occasional distresses which it brings upon them frequently lay the foundation of their future success. The violence with which wicked men pursue their resentment, defeats its own purpose; and engages the world on the side of the virtuous, whom they persecute. The attempts of malice, to blacken and defame them, bring forth their characters with more advantage, to the view of impartial beholders. The extremities to which they are reduced by injustice and oppression, rouse their courage and activity; and often give occasion to such vigorous efforts in their just defence, as overcome all opposition, and terminate in prosperity and success. Even in cases where the *wrath of man* appears to prevail over the peaceable and the just, it is frequently, in its issue, converted into a blessing. How many have had reason to be thankful, for being disappointed by their enemies in designs which they earnestly pursued, but which, if successfully accomplished, they have afterwards seen, would have occasioned their ruin? *Whose is wise and will observe these things; even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.*

While the *wrath of man* thus praises God by the advantages which it is made to bring to good men; as
individuals

individuals, the divine hand is equally apparent in the similar effects which it is appointed to produce to nations and societies. When wars and commotions shake the earth, when factions rage, and intestine divisions embroil kingdoms that before were flourishing, Providence seems, at first view, to have abandoned public affairs to the misrule of human passions. Yet from the midst of this confusion order is often made to spring; and from these mischiefs lasting advantages to arise. By such convulsions, nations are roused from that dangerous lethargy into which flowing wealth, long peace, and growing effeminacy of manners had sunk them. They are awaked to discern their true interests; and thought to take proper measures for security and defence against all their foes. Inveterate prejudices are corrected and latent sources of danger are discovered. Public spirit is called forth; and larger views of national happiness are formed. The corruptions to which every government is liable, are often rectified by a ferment in the political body, as noxious humours in the animal frame are carried off by the shock of a disease. Attempts made against a wise and well established civil constitution, tends in the issue to strengthen it; and the disorders of licentiousness and faction, teach men more highly to prize the blessings of tranquillity and legal protection.

FOURTHLY, *the wrath of man*, when it breaks forth in the persecution of religion, praises the divine goodness by being rendered conducive to the advancement of truth and propagation of religion in the world. The church of God, since the days of its infancy, hath never been entirely exempted from the wrath of the world; and in those ages, during which it was most exposed to that wrath, it hath always flourished the most. In vain the policy and the rage of men united their efforts to extinguish this divine light. Though all the four winds blew against it, it only

only shown brighter, and flamed higher. Many waters could not quench it, nor all the floods drown it. The constancy and fortitude of those who suffered for the truth, had a much greater effect in increasing the number of converts, than all the terror and cruelty of persecutors, in diminishing it. By this means, the wrath of man was made to turn against itself, to the distraction of its own purpose; like waves, which assaulting a rock with impotent fury, discover its immoveable stability, while they dash themselves in pieces at their feet.

I SHALL only add one other instance of the wrath of man praising God, by accomplishing ends of most extensive benefit to mankind. Never did the rage and malice of the wicked imagine that they had obtained a more complete triumph, than in the death of Jesus Christ. When they had executed their purpose of making him suffer as a malefactor, they were confident that they had extinguished his name, and discomfited his followers for ever. Behold how feeble are the efforts of the wrath of man against the decree of Heaven! All that they intended to overthrow, they most effectually established. The death of Christ was, in the counsels of Heaven, the spring of everlasting life to the faithful. The cross on which he suffered with apparent ignominy, became the standard of eternal honour to him; the ensign under which his followers assembled, and triumphed. He who, at his pleasure, restrained the remainder of wrath, suffered the rage of our Saviour's enemies, to suggest no other things to them than what, long before, He had determined, and his prophets had foretold. They all conspired to render the whole scene of Christ's sufferings exactly conformable to the original, predicted plan of divine mercy and goodness; and each of them contributed his share to accomplish that great undertaking, which none of them in the least understood, nor meant to promote. So remarkable an instance as this, fully ascertained

ascertained in Scripture, of the *wrath of man* ministering to the designs of Heaven, ought to be frequently in our eye; as an exemplification of the conduct of Providence in many other cases, where we have not so much light afforded us for tracing its ways.

By this induction of particulars, the doctrine contained in the text is plainly and fully verified. We have seen, that the disorders which the pride and passions of men occasion in the world, though they take rise from the corruption of human nature in this fallen state, yet are so over-ruled by Providence, as to redound to his honour and glory who governs all. They illustrate before the world the divine perfections in the admiration of the universe. They serve the purposes of moral and religious improvement to the souls of men. By a secret tendency, they advance the welfare of those whom they appear to threaten with evil. *Surely, O God! the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*—In thy hand it is; and thou never lettest it forth but in weight and measure. It is wild and intractable in its nature; but Thou tamest it. It is blind and headlong in its impulse; but Thou directest it. It struggles continually to break its chain; but Thou confinest it; Thou retrenchest all the superfluity of its fury.—Let us now consider, what improvement is to be made of this meditation on the ways of Providence.

In the first place, let it lead us to a religious contemplation of the hand of God in all the transactions of the world. In the ordinary course of human affairs, we behold a very mixed and busy scene; the passions of men variously agitated, and new changes daily taking place upon this stage of time. We behold peace and war alternately returning; the fortunes of private men rising and falling; and states and nations partaking of the same vicissitude. In all this, if we attend only to the operation of external causes,

causes, and to the mere rotation of events, we view no more than the inanimate part of nature; we stop at the surface of things; we contemplate the great spectacle which is presented to us, not with the eyes of rational and intelligent beings. The life and beauty of the universe arises from the view of that wisdom and goodness which animates and conducts the whole, and unites all the parts in one great design. There is an eternal mind who puts all those wheels in motion; himself remaining for ever at rest. Nothing is void of God. Even in the passions and ragings of men, He is to be found; and where they imagine they guide themselves they are guided and controuled by his hand. What solemn thoughts and devout affections ought this meditation to inspire; when in viewing the affairs of the world, we attend not merely to the actions of men, but to the ways of God; and consider ourselves, and all our concerns, as included in his high administration!

IN the second place, the doctrine which has been illustrated should prevent us from censuring Providence, on account of any seeming disorders and evils which at present take place in the world. The various instances which have been pointed out in this discourse, of human passion and wickedness rendered subservient to wise and useful ends, give us the highest reason to conclude that, in all other cases of seeming evil, the like ends are carried on. This ought to satisfy our mind, even when the prospect is most dark and discouraging. The plans of divine wisdom are too large and comprehensive to be discerned by us in all their extent; and where we see only by parts, we must frequently be at a loss in judging of the whole. *The way of God is in the sea, and his path in the great waters; his footsteps are not known. But although thou sayest thou canst not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.* As in the natural world, no real deformity is found, nothing but what has either some ornament, or some use; so

in the moral world, the most irregular and deformed appearances contribute in one way or other to the order of the whole. The Supreme Being, from the most opposite and disagreeing principles, forms universal concord, and adapts even the most harsh and dissonant notes to the harmony of his praise. As he hath reared the goodly frame of nature from various and jarring elements, and hath settled it in peace; so he hath formed such an union by his providence of the more various interests, and more jarring passions of men, that they all conspire to his glory, and co-operate for general good.—How amazing is that wisdom, which comprehends such infinite diversities, and contrarieties, within its scheme! How powerful that hand, which bends to its own purpose the good and the bad, the busy and the idle, the friends and the foes of truth; which obliges them all to hold on their course to his glory, though divided from one another by a multiplicity of pursuits, and differing often from themselves; and while they all move at their own freedom, yet by a secret influence, winds and turns them at his will! *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!*

IN the third place, we see, from what has been said, how much reason there is for submission to the decrees of Heaven. Whatever distresses we suffer from the *wrath of man*, we have ground to believe that they befall not in vain. In the midst of human violence, or oppression, we are not left to be the sport of fortune. Higher counsels are concerned. Wise and good designs are going on. God is always carrying forward his own purposes; and if these terminate in his glory, which is ever the same with the felicity of the righteous, is not this a sufficient reason for our calm and chearful acquiescence?

Hence also, to conclude, arises the most powerful argument for studying, with zealous assiduity, to gain the

the favour and protection of the Almighty. If his displeasure hang over our heads, all things around us may be just objects of terrour. For against him, there is no defence, The most violent powers in nature are ministers to him. Formidable, indeed, may prove the *wrath of man*, if he be pleased to let it forth against us. To him, but not to us, it belongs to restrain it at pleasure. Whereas, when we are placed under his protection, all human wrath is divested of its terrours. *If he be for us, who or what can be against us ?* Let us pursue the measures which he hath appointed for obtaining his grace by faith, repentance and a holy life, and we shall have no reason to be afraid of evil tidings; *our hearts will be fixed trusting in the Lord.* When the religious fear of God possesses the heart, it expels the ignoble fear of men; and becomes the principle of courage and magnanimity. The Lord is a buckler and a shield to them that serve him. *When he ariseth, his enemies shall be scattered, as smoke is driven away, and as chaff before the wind. He giveth strength and victory to his people; he cloatheth them with salvation. The wrath of man shall praise him; and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain.*

S E R M O N XXX.

Preached before the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge.

ISAIAH xi. 9.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountains; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

THIS passage of Scripture is understood, by all Christian interpreters, to refer to the days of the Gospel.

Gospel. The Prophet describes, in the Messiah's reign, as extending over all nature, and producing universal felicity. The full accomplishment of this prediction is yet future, and respects some more advanced periods of the kingdom of God, when true religion shall universally prevail, and the native tendency of the Gospel attain its entire effect. In the prospect of this event, the Prophet seems to rise above himself, and celebrates that happy age in the most sublime strain of eastern poetry. He opens a beautiful view of the state of the world, as a state of returning innocence. He represents all nature flourishing in peace; discord and guile abolished; the most hostile natures reconciled, and the most, savage reformed and tamed. *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The lion shall eat straw like the ox; and the suckling child shall play on the whole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

Upon reading these words, we must immediately perceive the great encouragement which they give to all good designs for promoting religion in the world. When we engage in these, we have the comfort of being engaged, not only in a good cause, but also in one that shall undoubtedly be successful. For we are here assured by the divine promise, that truth and righteousness shall at length prevail and that the increasing influence of religion shall introduce general happiness. It is a pleasing and animating reflection, that in carrying on such designs, we act upon the divine plan; and co-operate with God for advancing the kingdom of the Messiah. We have no reason to be discouraged by any unfavourable circumstances which at present oppose our pious endeavours,

vours. Though the ignorance, superstition, and corruption, which now fill so great a part of the world, have a dark and mysterious aspect, it is not beyond the power of that Supreme Being who brings light out of darkness, to clear up those perplexing appearances, and gradually to extricate mankind from the labyrinth of ignorance and error. Let us consider how improbable it seemed, when the gospel was first published, that it should extend so far, and overthrow so much established superstition, as it has already done. There is nothing, in the present state of the world, to render it more unlikely that it shall one day be universally received, and prevail in its full influence. At the raise of Christianity, the disproportion was, at least, as great, between the apparent human causes, and the effect which has actually been produced, as there is, in our age, between the circumstances of religion in the world, and the effect which we farther expect. *The Son of righteousness* having already exerted its influence in breaking through the thickest darkness, we may justly hope, that it is powerful enough to dispel all remaining obscurity; and that it will ascend by degrees to that perfect day, when *healing shall be under its wings* to all the nations. *A little one shall become a thousand; and a small one, a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it in its time.*

BESIDES the prediction which the text contains of the future success of religion, it points out also a precise connexion between the increase of religious knowledge, and the happiness of mankind. *The knowledge of the Lord filling the earth*, is assigned as the cause why *they shall not hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God*. To this I am now to lead your thoughts; as a object both suited to the occasion of the present meeting, and proper to be illustrated in times, where total indifference to religious principles appear to gain ground, Whether Christianity shall be propagated farther or not, is treated as

a matter of no great concern to mankind. The opinion prevails among many, that moral virtue may subsist, with equal advantage, independent of religion. For moral principles, great regard is professed; but articles of religious belief are held to be abstract tenets, remote from life; points of mere speculation and debate, the influence of which is very inconsiderable on the actions of men. Their general conduct, it is contended, will always proceed upon views and principles which have more relation to the present state of things; and religious knowledge can therefore stand in no necessary connection with their happiness and prosperity.—How adverse such opinions are both to the profession and practice of religion, is abundantly evident. How adverse they are to the general welfare and real interests of mankind, I hope to make appear to candid minds.

By *the knowledge of the Lord* in the text, is not to be understood the natural knowledge of God only. It is plain, that the Prophet spake of the age of the Messiah, when more enlarged discoveries should be made to mankind of the divine perfections and government, than unassisted reason could attain. *The knowledge of the Lord*, therefore, comprehends the principles of Christianity, as well of natural religion. In order to discern the importance of such knowledge to general happiness, we shall consider man, I. as an individual; II. as a member of society.

I. CONSIDERING man as an individual, let us inquire, how far the knowledge of true religion is important, first, to his improvement; next, to his consolation.

FIRST, with respect to the improvement of man; the advancement of his nature in what is valuable and useful, the acquisition of such dispositions and habits as fit him for acting his part with propriety on this stage, and prepare him for a higher state of action hereafter; what benefit does he receive, in these

these respects, from religious knowledge and belief? It is obvious, that all increases of knowledge is improvement to the understanding. The more that its sphere is enlarged, the greater number of objects that are submitted to its view, especially when these objects are of intrinsic excellence, the more must those rational powers, which are the glory of man, be in the course of attaining their proper strength and maturity. But where the knowledge of religion merely speculative, though the speculation must be admitted to be noble, yet less could be said of its importance. We recommend it to mankind, as forming the heart, and directing the life. Those pure and exalted conceptions which the Christian religion has taught us to entertain of the Deity, as the universal Father and righteous Governour of the universe, the standard of unspotted perfection, and *the author of every good and perfect gift*; conducting his whole administration with an eternal regard to order, virtue, and truth; ever favouring the cause and supporting the interest of righteous men; and applying, in this direction, the whole might of omnipotence, and the whole council of unerring wisdom, from the beginning to the end of things; such conceptions both kindle devotion, and strengthen virtue. They give fortitude to the mind in the practice of righteousness, and established the persuasion of its being our highest interest.

All the doctrines peculiar to the Gospel are great improvements on what the light of nature had imperfectly suggested. A high dispensation of Providence is made known, particularly suited to the exigences of man; calculated for recovering him from that corrupted state into which experience bears witness that he is fallen, and for restoring him to integrity, and favour with his Creator. The method of carrying on this great plan is such as gives us the most striking views of the importance of righteousness or
virtue

virtue, and of the high account in which it stands with God. The Son of God appeared on the earth, and suffered as a propitiation for the sins of the world, with this express intention, that he might *bring in everlasting righteousness*; that he might *purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God*; that he might *redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*, such a merciful interposition of the Creator of the world, while it illustriously displays his goodness, and signalizes his concern for the moral interests of mankind, affords us, at the same time, the most satisfying ground of confidence and trust. It offers an object to the mind, on which it can lay hold for the security of its future hopes; when, with a certainty far beyond what any abstract argument could yield, it appeals to a distinguished fact; and is enabled to say, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

While the divine Government is thus placed in a light the most amiable, and most encouraging to every virtuous mind, there is, at the same time, something extremely awful and solemn in the whole doctrine of redemption. It is calculated to strike the mind with reverence for the divine administration. It points at some deep malignity in sin, at some dreadful consequences flowing from guilt, unknown in their cruses and in the whole effects to us, which moved the Sovereign of the World to depart from the ordinary course of Providence, and to bring about the restoration of his fallen creatures by a method so astonishing. Mankind are hereby awakened to the most serious reflections. Such views are opened of the sanctity of the divine laws, of the strictness of the divine justices of the importance of the part which is assigned them to act, as serve to prevent their trifling with human life, and add dignity and solemnity

solemnity to virtue. These great purposes are farther carried on, by the discovery which is made of the fixed connection in which this life stands with a future eternal state. We are represented as *sowing now, what we are to reap hereafter*; undergoing a course of probation and trial, which, according as it terminates in our improvement, or leaves us unreformed and corrupted, will dismiss us to lasting abodes, either of punishment or reward. Such a discovery rises far above the dubious conjectures, and uncertain reasonings, which mere natural light suggests concerning the future condition of mankind. Here we find, what alone can produce any considerable influence on practice, explicit promise and threatening; an authoritative sanction given to a law; the Governor and Judge revealed; and all the motives which can operate on hope and fear, brought home to the heart, with *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts*. In a word, a great and magnificent plan of divine administration is opened to us, in the Gospel of Christ; and nothing is omitted that can impress mankind with the persuasion of their being all, in the strictest sense, subjects of the moral government of God.

THOUGH the bounds of this Discourse allow us to take only an imperfect view of the principles of Christian doctrine, yet the hints which have been given lay a sufficient foundation for appealing to every impartial mind, whether the knowledge and belief of such principles be not intimately connected with the improvement, and, by consequence, with the happiness of man. I reason now with such as admit, that virtue is the great source both of improvement and happiness. Let them lay what stress they please upon the authority of conscience, and upon the force and evidence of its dictates; can they refuse to allow that, the natural tendency of the principles which I have mentioned, is to support these dictates, and to con-

firm that authority ; to excite, on various occasions, the most useful sentiments ; to provide additional restraints from vice, and additional motives to every virtue ? Who dares pronounce, that there is no case in which conscience stands in need of such assistance, to direct, where there is so much uncertainty and darkness ; and to prompt, where there is so much feebleness and irresolution, and such a fatal proneness to vice and folly ?

But how good soever the tendency of religious principles may be, some will still call in question their actual significance, and influence on life. This tendency is by various causes defeated. Between the belief of religious principles and a correspondent practice, it will be alledged that frequent experience shews there is no necessary connection ; and that therefore the propagation of the one, cannot give us any assurance of proportionable improvements following in the other.—This, in part, is granted to be true ; as we admit that religious knowledge and belief are susceptible of various degrees, before they arrive at that real Christian Faith which the Scripture represents as *purifying the heart*. But though the connection between principle and practice be not necessary and invariable, it will not, I suppose, be denied that there is some connection. Here then one avenue to the heart is opened. If the tendency of religious knowledge be good, wisdom must direct, and duty oblige us to cultivate it. For tendency will, at least in some cases, rise into effect ; and, probably, in more cases than are known and observed by the world. Besides the distinguished examples of true religion and virtue which have, more or less, adored every age of the Christian era, what numbers may there be, in the more silent and private scenes of life, overlooked by superficial observers of mankind, on whose hearts and lives religious principles have the most happy influence ? Even on those
and

and giddy minds, where they are far from operating their full effect, their influence is, frequently, not altogether lost. Impressions of religion often check vice in its career. They prevent it from proceeding its utmost length; and though they do not entirely reform the offender, they serve to maintain order in society. Persons who are now bad, might probably have been worse without them, and the world have suffered more from unrestrained licentiousness. They often sow latent seeds of goodness in the heart, which proper circumstances and occasions afterwards ripen; though the reformation of the offender may not be so conspicuous, as his former enormities have been. From the native tendency of religious belief, there is reason to conclude, that those good effects of it are not so rare as some would represent them. By its nature and tendency, we can better judge of its effects, than by observations drawn from a supposed experience, which often is narrow in its compass, and fallacious in its conclusions.

The actual influence of principle and belief on mankind, admits of clear illustration from uncontested matter of fact. They who hold the good effects of Christian principles to be so inconsiderable, as to render the propagation of them of small importance, will be at no loss to give us instances of corrupt principles of belief, having had the most powerful influence on the world. Loud complaints we hear from this quarter, of the direful effects which superstition and enthusiasm have produced; of their having poisoned the tempers, and transformed the manners of men; of their having overcome the strongest restraints of law, of reason, and humanity. Is this then the case that all principles, except good ones, are of such mighty energy?—Strange! that false religion should be able to do so much, and true religion so little; that belief, so powerful in the one case, should be so impotent in the other.—No impartial enquirer,

enquirer, surely, can entertain this opinion. The whole history of mankind shows that their religious tenets and principles, of whatever nature they be, are of great influence in forming their character, and directing their conduct. The mischief which false principles have done, affords a good argument to guard carefully against error; but as it is a proof of what belief can do, it gives ground to hope the more from it, when rightly directed. The same torrent which, when it is put out of its natural course overflows and lays waste a country, adorns and enriches it, when running in its proper channel. If it be alledged that superstition is likely to be more powerful in its effects than truth, because it agrees better with the follies and corruptions of the world, we may oppose to this on the other hand, that truth has the divided blessing and the countenance of Heaven on its side. Let us always hope well of a cause that is good in itself, and beneficial to mankind. Truth is mighty, and will prevail. Let us spread the *incorruptable seed* as widely as we can, and trust in God that he will give the increase. Having thus shown the importance of religious knowledge to mankind in the way of improvement, let us,

In the second place, consider it in the light of consolation; as bringing aid and relief to us amidst the distresses of life. Here religion contestably triumphs; and its happy effects in this respect, furnish a strong argument to every benevolent mind for wishing them to be farther diffused throughout the world. For without the belief and hope afforded by divine Revelation, the circumstances of man are extremely forlorn. He finds himself placed here as a stranger in a vast universe, where the powers and operations of nature are very imperfectly known; where both the beginnings and the issues of things are involved in mysterious darkness; where he is unable to discover, with any certainty, whence he sprung, or for what purpose

purpose he was brought into this state of existence ; whether he be subjected to the government of a mild, or of a wrathful ruler ; what construction he is to put on many of the dispensations of his providence ; and what his fate is to be when he departs hence. What a disconsolate situation, to a serious enquiring mind ! The greater degree of virtue it possesses, its sensibility is likely to be the more oppressed by this burden of labouring thought. Even though it were in one's power to banish all uneasy thought, and to fill up the hours of life with perpetual amusement, life so filled up would, upon reflection, appear poor and trivial. But these are far from being the terms upon which man is brought into this world. He is conscious that his being is frail and feeble ; he sees himself beset with various dangers ; and is exposed to many a melancholy apprehension, from the evils which he may have to encounter, before he arrives at the close of life. In this distressed condition to reveal to him such discoveries of the Supreme Being as the Christian religion affords, is to reveal to him a Father and a Friend ; is to let in a ray of the most cheering light upon the darkness of the human estate. He who was before a destitute orphan, wondering in the inhospitable desert, has now gained a shelter from the bitter and inclement blast. He now knows to whom to pray, and in whom to trust ; where to unbosom his sorrows ; and from what hand to look for relief.

It is certain, that when the heart bleeds from some wound of recent misfortune, nothing is of equal efficacy with religious comfort. It is of power to enlighten the darkest hour, and to assuage the severest woe, by the belief of divine favour, and the prospect of a blessed immortality. In such hopes, the mind expiates with joy ; and when bereaved of its earthly friends, solaces itself with the thoughts of one friend who will never forsake it. Refined reasonings
concerning

concerning the nature of the human condition, and the improvement which philosophy teaches us to make of every event, may entertain the mind when it is at ease; may perhaps contribute to sooth it, when slightly touched with sorrow. But when it is torn with any sore distress, they are cold and feeble, compared with a direct promise from the word of God. *This is an anchor to the soul both sure and stedfast.* This has given consolation and refuge to many a virtuous heart, at a time when the most cogent reasonings would have proved utterly unavailing.

Upon the approach of death, especially, when if a man thinks at all, his anxiety about his future interests must naturally increase, the power of religious consolation is sensibly felt. Then appears, in the most striking light, the high value of the discoveries made by the Gospel; not only life and immortality revealed, but a mediator with God discovered; mercy proclaimed, through him, to the frailties of the penitent and the humble; and his presence promised to be with them when they are passing through *the valley of the shadow of death*, in order to bring them safe into unseen habitations of rest and joy. Here is ground for their leaving the world with comfort and peace. But in this severe and trying period, this labouring hour of nature, how shall the unhappy man support himself, who knows not, or believes not, the hope of religion? Secretly conscious to himself that he has not acted his part as he ought to have done, the sins of his past life arise before him in sad remembrance. He wishes to exist after death, and yet dreads that existence. The Governor of the world is unknown. He cannot tell whether every endeavour to obtain his mercy may not be in vain. All is awful obscurity around him; and in the midst of endless doubts and perplexities, the trembling, reluctant soul, is forced away from the body. As the misfortunes of life must, to such a man, have been most oppressive,

so its end is bitter. His sun sets in a dark cloud ; and the night of death closes over his head, full of misery. Having now shown how important *the knowledge of the Lord* is, both to the improvement and the consolation of man, consider as an individual, I am next to shew,

II. How important this knowledge as to him as a member of society. This branch of the subject is in part anticipated by what has been said. For all the improvement which man receives as an individual, redounds of the benefit of the public. Society reaps the fruit of the virtues of all the members who compose it ; and in proportion as each, apart, is made better, the whole must flourish.

But besides this effect, religious knowledge has a direct tendency to improve the social intercourse of men, and to assist them in co-operating for common good. It is the great instrument of civilizing the multitude, and forming them to union. It tames the fierceness of their passions, and softens the rudeness of their manners. There is much reason to doubt whether any regular society ever subsisted, or could subsist, in the world, destitute of all religious ideas and principles. They who, in early times, attempted to bring the wandering and scattered tribes of men from the woods, and to unite them in cities and communities, always found it necessary to begin with some institution of religion. The wisest legislators of old, through the whole progress of their systems of government, considered religion as essential to civil polity. If even those imperfect forms of it, loaded with so much superstition and error, were important to the welfare of society, how much more that reasonable worship of the true God, which is taught by the Gospel ? True religion introduces the idea of regular subjection, by accustoming mankind to the awe of superiour power in the Deity, joined with the veneration of superiour wisdom and goodness.

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It is by its nature an associating principle ; and creates new and sacred bonds of union among men. Common assemblies for religious worship, and joint homage offered up to one God ; the sense of being all dependent on the same protection, and bound to duty by the same ties, sharers in the same benefits of heaven, and expectants of the same reward, tend to awaken the sentiments of friendly relation, and to confirm and strengthen our mutual connexion. The doctrine of Christianity is most adverse to all tyranny and oppression, but highly favourable to the interests of good government among men. It represses the spirit of licentiousness and sedition. It inculcates the duty of subordination to lawful superiours. It requires us to *fear God, to honour the king, and not to meddle with them that are given to change.*

Religious knowledge forwards all useful and ornamental improvements in society. Experience shows, that in proportion as it diffuses its light, learning flourishes, and liberal arts are cultivated and advanced. Just conceptions of religion promote a free and manly spirit. They lead men to think for themselves ; to form their principles upon fair inquiry, and not to resign their conscience to the dictates of men. Hence they naturally inspire aversion to slavery of every kind ; and promote a taste for liberty and laws. Despotic governments have generally taken the firmest root among nations that were blinded by Mahometan or Pagan darkness ; where the throne of violence has been supported by ignorance and false religion. In the Christian world, during those centuries in which gross superstition held its reign undisturbed, oppression and slavery were in its train. The cloud of ignorance sat thick and deep over the nations ; and the world was threatened with a relapse into ancient barbarity. As soon as the true *Knowledge of the Lord* revived, at the auspicious æra of the Reformation, learning, liberty, and arts, began to shine forth with it, and to resume their lustre.

But

But the happy influence which religion exerts on society, extends much farther than to effects of this kind. It is not only subsidiary to the improvement, but necessary to the preservation of society. It is the very basis on which it rests. Religious principle is what gives men the surest hold of one another. The last and greatest pledge of veracity, an oath, without which no society could subsist, derives its whole authority from an established reverence of God, to whom it is a solemn appeal. Banish religious principle, and you loosen all the bonds which connect mankind together; you shake the fundamental pillar of mutual confidence and trust; you render the security arising from laws, in a great measure, void and ineffectual. For human laws, and human sanctions, cannot extend to numberless cases, in which the safety of mankind is deeply concerned. they would prove very feeble instruments of order and peace, if there were no checks upon the conduct of men from the sense of divine legislation; if no belief of future rewards and punishments were to overawe conscience, and to supply the defects of human government.

Indeed the belief of religion is of such importance to public welfare, that the most expressive description we could give of a society of men in the utmost disorder, would be to say, that there was no fear of God left among them. Imagination would immediately conceive of them as abandoned to rapine and violence, to perfidy and treachery; as deceiving and deceived, oppressing and oppressed; consumed by intestine broils, and ripe for becoming a prey to the first invader. On the other hand, in order to form the idea of a society flourishing in its highest glory, we need only conceive the belief of Christian principles exerting its full influence on the hearts and lives of all the members. Instantly, the most amiable scene would open to our view. We should see the causes of public disunion removed, when men were
animated

animated with that noble spirit of love and charity which our religion breaths; and formed to the pursuit of those higher interests, which give no occasion to the competition and jealousy. We should see families, neighbourhoods, and communities, living in unbroken amity, and pursuing, with one heart and mind, the common interests; sobriety of manners, and simplicity of life, restored; virtuous industry carrying on its usual labours, and cheerful contentment every where reigning. Politicians may lay down what plans they please for advancing public prosperity, but, in truth, it is the prevalency of such principles of religion and virtue, which forms the strength and glory of a nation. When these are totally wanting, no measures contrived by human wisdom can supply the defect. In proportion as they prevail, they raise the state of society from that sad degeneracy into which it is at present sunk; and carry it forward, under the blessing of Heaven, towards that happy period, when *nations shall not lift up their sword against nation, nor learn war any more.*

In order to prove the importance of religious knowledge to the interest of society, one consideration more, deserving particular attention, remains to be mentioned. It is, that if *good seed* be not sown in the field, *tares* will not infallibly spring up. The propensity towards religion is strong in the human heart. There is a natural preparation in our minds, for receiving some impression of supernatural belief. Upon these among ignorant and uncultivated men, superstition or enthusia'm never fail to graft themselves. Into what monstrous forms these have shot forth, and what various mischiefs they have produced to society, is too well known. Nor is this the whole of the danger. Desining men are always ready to take advantage of this popular weakness, and to direct the superstitious bias of the multitude to their own ambitious and interested ends. Superstition, in itself a formidable

midable evil, threatens consequences still more formidable, when it is rendered the tool of design and craft. Hence arises one of the most powerful arguments for propagating with zeal, as far as our influence can extend, the pure and undefiled doctrines of the Gospel of Christ; in order that just and rational principles of religion may fill up that room in the minds of men, which dangerous fanaticism will otherwise usurp.

This consideration alone is sufficient to shew the high utility of the design undertaken by the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge. With great propriety, they have bestowed their chief attention on a remote quarter of our own country, where, from a variety of causes, ignorance and superstition had gained more ground, than in any other corner of the land; where the inhabitants, by their local situation, were more perfectly supplied with the means of proper education and instruction; and at the same time exposed to the seductions of such as sought to prevent them from the truth. The laudable endeavours of the Society in diffusing religious and useful knowledge through this part of the country, have already been crowded with much success; and more is still to be expected from the continuance of their pious and well-directed attention.

With such good designs, it becomes all to co-operate, who are lovers of mankind. Thus shall they show their just sense of the value of that blessing which they enjoy, in the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ; and their gratitude to Heaven for conferring it upon them. Thus shall they make the blessings of those who are now ready to *perish through the lack of knowledge*, descend upon their heads. Thus shall they contribute their endeavours for bringing forward that happy period foretold by ancient prophecy; when *there shall be one Lord over all*

all the earth, and his name one; when that name shall be great from the rising to the setting sun; when there shall be nothing to hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God; but judgment shall dwell in the wilderness and righteousness remain in the fruitful field; the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose; and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*.

* Zechar. xiv. 9. Malachi i. 11. Isaiah xxxiii. 16. xxxv. 8.



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* Zechar. xiv. 9. Malachi i. 11. Isaiah xxxiii. 16. xxxiv. 1.



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